



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT
AND CITY SERVICES**

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2020-2021](#))

Members:

**MS J CLAY (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)
MR M PARTON**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 4 MARCH 2022

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr M Riordan (Ph: 620 50199)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 12.30 pm.

Appearances:

Steel, Mr Chris, Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services, Special Minister of State

Transport Canberra and City Services

Playford, Ms Alison, Director-General

McHugh, Mr Ben, Deputy Director-General, Transport Canberra and Business Services

Bowdery, Mr John, Executive Branch Manager, Strategic Policy and Customer

McGlenn, Mr Ian, Executive Branch Manager, Bus Operations, Transport Canberra

Sturman, Ms Judith, Executive Group Manager, Transport Canberra

Fraser, Ms Shelly, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Roads ACT, City Services

Cahif, Mr Ashley, Project Director, Light Rail Stage 2 to Woden, Major Projects Canberra

Edghill, Mr Duncan, Chief Projects Officer, Major Projects Canberra

THE CHAIR: I would like to welcome everybody to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services. It has obviously been a long haul. Before we begin, on behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on. There may actually be people dialling in from other lands, and we welcome you. I would like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge their really deep and valuable contribution to the ongoing life and culture of our city.

For anybody in this room who may be speaking today, can I just see a thumbs up, virtually or physically, that you have seen and acknowledge the privilege statement and you understand what that means. Can I go around the room on that one? That looks pretty good. We are recording our hearings today, and they are also being broadcast live. When you take a question on notice, please state clearly that you are taking that question on notice. That will really help out our secretariat.

Today Minister Steel is talking to us about transport, active transport and road safety. I am very comfortable with members jumping in and asking whichever question they would like to ask, whenever. We are not going to segment the session. Just make sure that you introduce it clearly so that our officials and our minister know exactly what we are asking at any given time.

We are not inviting opening statements, so I might jump in and start with the first question. Minister, I am really interested in the Disruption Taskforce. I am pleased that you have identified that as a really powerful point at which we might be able to help people shift from one mode of transport—cars—into other modes of transport. I am really interested to know how many FTEs you have working on that shift, that behavioural change program, to encourage people into active transport and perhaps other modes while that work is going on.

Mr Steel: I have read and understood the privilege statement. With big challenges

come big opportunities. We know that the construction of major infrastructure projects—not just raising London Circuit, and light rail, but also the work that the NCA is doing on the bridge augmentation of Commonwealth Avenue bridge and the other infrastructure projects that are being built around the city, both public and private—will mean a big change to the way that people move into work while that piece of construction is underway. So a lot of planning has been going into it, and we are looking at a range of different measures, some of which we have already announced, which go to traffic interventions to improve traffic flow, particularly on Parkes Way. We will be announcing further measures as the work of the task force progresses.

There are several streams of the task force, which I will hand over to Alison Playford to explain very shortly. The task force has involved quite a range of different areas from within Transport Canberra and City Services, using our existing resources as much as possible to bring together the expertise and knowledge in those different areas to come up with a holistic solution to addressing some of these disruption issues. There have been a range of different principles that the Disruption Taskforce has used. One of those is to intervene as far down the network as possible to help assist with managing the potential congestion. The active travel office, as well as public transport, have played quite a big part in that. I will hand over to Alison to explain further how the work in the Disruption Taskforce is going.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Alison, I might just direct you to the bit of it that I am particularly interested, which is active travel—the FTEs that you have working on that active travel shift, and maybe how you will be measuring whether that behaviour change works and measuring what success is in that.

Ms Playford: I have read the privilege statement. As the minister said, we are utilising existing FTEs from a range of different areas. There will be further announcements by government around the package of measures, but there is not a specific FTE allocation at this point. It is using existing resources, both within the directorate and in other directorates.

We are considering a range of options. One of the first areas is better access to existing services. There are a number of active travel measures: our regular community path program and how we might prioritise relevant paths related to people accessing the city over this time period; wayfinding; and expanding the e-scooter network and range. That will be a very specific active travel measure. We are looking at travel demand management, working with schools and workplaces around different opportunities. That will have some active travel components and build on the existing ride-to-school programs that we encourage. We will be targeting particularly those schools in the area that will be most affected by disruption, in terms of ramping up some of our existing programs in those areas.

We are looking at traffic interventions. Part of the traffic interventions will be looking at ways that we could make active travel perhaps more safe at key intersections et cetera. We are also looking at a range of measures in relation to public transport and mode shift. Some of those things will have active travel components, because it is about better connections. For some of our park-and-rides it may be about putting in better bike facilities et cetera so that people might bike and ride, and use different

options. Again, there is an active travel component to that.

I hope that answer specifically gives you some information on the types of active travel measures we are working on. There are a whole range of things, and the government will make further announcements about these packages.

THE CHAIR: That is lovely, and it may come in later announcements, in which case that is fine. I am also interested to know if there will be measurement of uptake, actual numbers of people using things?

Ms Playford: One of the things we are looking at is considering how we can measure the patronage of various things. We have various mechanisms for how we measure numbers of people on cycleways and roadways, and our public transport patronage. We will be looking at whether we need to enhance some of those systems around the city. That will be put in place so that we can look at how we are trending in relation to patronage and use.

There will probably be some surveys and those sorts of things, because a really big part of this strategy and the work of the Disruption Taskforce is in relation to communications, making sure not only that people are prepared well in advance for the changes but also, just as importantly, as construction starts and we see day-to-day some impacts and incidents on the network, that we are able to get real-time, fast information out to people which can help to inform their choices.

Mr Steel: It just so happens that the household travel survey work is also coinciding with this disruption period, so there is going to be an opportunity there to get a better sense of how people are moving around the city, particularly at a time when traffic volumes are just ticking up. As people have started coming back to face-to-face working arrangements, that has been really noticeable this week on the traffic network. The survey will give a sense of how people are faring and their feelings about returning to public transport and using active travel choices to move around. At the moment, the patronage has not ticked up as much as the private vehicle traffic has.

THE CHAIR: That is great. Thank you.

MR PARTON: In regard to the disruption, Minister, have you been courageous enough to come up with an estimate of how much the disruption will cost the city over the period that it takes to complete the works?

Mr Steel: I do not think that there has been any specific modelling, but I will hand over to MPC to talk to the construction impacts associated with raising London Circuit, and light rail. This is obviously something that we are actively working on in terms of business partnerships. Regarding how we work with businesses in the particular area that will be directly impacted, around the corridor, they can talk to what they are doing there.

The work of the Disruption Taskforce is designed to try to mitigate many of the disruption impacts, not only from our own projects but from those of others, as people move around the city, so that we can have efficient use of our road network, our cycle network and public transport during this period, to try to reduce any impacts.

Mr Edghill: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. In addition to the work of the Disruption Taskforce that Alison just stepped us through, an important part of what we are doing at the moment is working through exactly how we will approach construction for both raising London Circuit and then for the light rail stage 2A rail system.

We are in the procurement process at the moment for raising London Circuit, so we are not quite at the point of having finalised exactly the construction approach. A large part of what we are doing when we are looking at how we go about construction in the city is looking at how we can, firstly, minimise the amount of disruption that there is through the process. That is everything from looking at how we stage the works, how traffic arrangements will work to keep traffic flowing, and how and when boarding and so forth needs to go up.

MR PARTON: Mr Edghill, I appreciate the detail here. But what I am actually looking for is an estimated figure of how much that disruption will cost the city over the period. I understand that there may not be an estimate, but I am just trying to ascertain whether there is an estimated figure for the cost of disruption.

Mr Steel: I think what Mr Edghill was saying is that, because we will not understand the construction program fully until the procurement process is finalised, we actually will not know the extent of the disruption.

MR PARTON: I understand.

Mr Steel: The Disruption Taskforce will be ongoing. It will be monitoring what disruption is actually occurring as the construction begins, and we will get a better sense of that over time. We will be looking at what further measures we can take to try to minimise the extent of disruption as time progresses. That will often be on a daily basis, in terms of communicating with people about their commute into the city and through the parliamentary triangle.

MR PARTON: Minister, what is the expected climate impact of the disruption? I am just wondering if there has been an estimate of the additional emissions that the government has modelled over the duration of the disruption. Irrespective of what we are arriving at, irrespective of the conclusion of this work, it is apparent that there will be additional emissions created because of the disruption. Has that been factored in anywhere?

Mr Steel: The whole purpose of building a better public transport system is to try to support mode shift to more sustainable forms of travel. So, yes, there will be a longer term benefit around a mode shift from people in private cars that might be using fossil fuels through to a light rail system that runs on 100 per cent renewable electricity. In terms of the second-round effects of this project, no, that is not something that would be accounted for in a project. But certainly one of the long-term benefits is a reduction in emissions because of the sustainable use of public transport.

There is a clear climate benefit to public transport. That is clear for everyone to see. At the moment, of course, we have got advocacy underway to try to get the federal

government to move on vehicle emissions standards so that we can transfer, particularly with new vehicles, and make sure that they have a low emissions profile, or hopefully a zero emissions profile, over time.

MR PARTON: Minister. Minister—

Mr Steel: But they are resisting that. Your side of politics is resisting that, so I would like to see your advocacy on that issue in particular.

MR PARTON: Minister. Minister, we are not—

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton and Minister, I am just going to step in there. I think we have probably run that line of questioning for long enough. Mark, would you like to ask a fresh question? I remind everyone that we will just wait until one person has finished talking before the next person begins.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Chair. Minister, on page 244, works in progress, in the capital projects, stages 1 and 2 of the new Woden bus depot are slated for completion in June 2024. This is nearly five years after the original completion date. How is it that the bus depot is still more than two years away, when this original project was supposed to be well and truly completed by now?

Mr Steel: We have been through this in previous hearings, so I will just reiterate the point that I have made previously, which is that we have been very clear that we want this bus depot to be ready for the new electric buses that are going to be joining our fleet. We can accommodate a certain number of electric buses within our existing depots, which has been a great outcome. We have just announced that we are leasing 12 electric buses initially, which will be housed at Tuggeranong and Belconnen.

We are also in the market, in the final stages of procurement, with an RFP going out for 90 electric buses, most of which will be housed at the Woden depot as part of the work that has been undertaken on the zero emissions transition plan for Transport Canberra. We have been doing that work in order to make sure that the new Woden depot is going to be compliant and meets the technical requirements to house electric buses. So that we do not have to retrofit a new bus depot that we have just built, we want to build it from day one with those electric charging capabilities. That piece of work has taken some time, but I think it will be worthwhile.

In the interim, we are able to operate our current fleet from the existing depots until that is ready. It has not affected greatly the operational needs of Transport Canberra. I think it has been the right decision to do the work that is necessary around the technical requirements for a fully electric depot in order to have that operational, with all of the capability that is required, and the infrastructure to support the electric fleet.

MR PARTON: Are you able to absolutely commit to a finish date here today?

Mr Steel: No, and I would not do that on any project. This is obviously something—

MR PARTON: So it could be 2030.

Mr Steel: No, I do not think it will be going that far. I will hand over to Ben McHugh, Deputy Director-General, Transport Canberra, to talk through the current stage and where the bus depot program is up to. We are expecting a lot of activity on site in the next couple of weeks, in fact.

Mr McHugh: Thanks, Minister. To expand on the detail that the minister provided there, the last number of months have been spent ensuring that the design that we engage our delivery partner to build does allow for the inclusion of our impending electric bus fleet as it comes online through our current and future procurement processes. We recently finalised that to the point where we have engaged our delivery partner to commence construction activity on site. We will see further site preparation over the next few weeks and then the delivery of the facility itself.

In terms of time frames, we are still looking at the current published time frame of 2024 for having that depot operational. We plan to house buses that are procured through our future procurement of 90 battery electric buses on that site, when it is up and operational in 2024. That is our current planning.

MR PARTON: All right. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: The ACT Greens have a very clear policy position on our electric transition. We aim for 2035. We are really excited to see that the New South Wales government have brought that forward; they are going for 2030. We are absolutely delighted that we are not buying any more diesel buses. I think that is great. We are all very keen for the electric transition to go ahead, obviously on all sides of politics, which is really good news. Did we look at swap-and-go batteries or any other schemes while we were looking at this upgrade?

Mr Steel: The government position, both Labor and Greens, is a transition by 2040. Of course, that could occur earlier, depending on where the technology is up to. We have seen the technology mature significantly just in the last couple of years since we undertook a trial in 2018, and then a later trial in 2020 which was much more successful. We have seen that transition happen. The opportunity is certainly there in the future to look at supporting a faster transition, if that is possible and feasible. That is taken into account in our zero emissions transition plan. I will hand over to Ben McHugh to talk about what options were considered as part of this and what we will be considering in the future as the technology matures.

Mr McHugh: Thanks, Minister. Absolutely, this is a rapidly moving field of technology. What we are really conscious of is ensuring that we do not tie ourselves to a particular outcome at this point in time. I think that is reflected in the time it has taken to get the Woden bus depot to a point where we are confident enough to press go on the build. There is provision in there for a range of bus management solutions.

Obviously, leasing buses and leasing batteries, either together or separately, or purchasing the bus and leasing the battery—all of those things are built into our planning and into our infrastructure now so that we have the flexibility to adjust as technology evolves. We are really in a learning phase, as an organisation, in this space, as are all other jurisdictions at the moment, as we bring these sorts of buses into our systems and our networks.

So, absolutely, we will be guided a little bit by the market on what is available now and what is going to be available in the future in terms of what is the best solution for us. We are looking at not just the batteries but other components that are different from the diesel buses that we have been managing in our systems for some time. We are definitely open to the emergence of new opportunities in that space.

MS ORR: With the zero emissions transition plan, I was intending to ask about the main elements and where they are all up to, but I feel we have covered quite a lot of that. Is there anything else under the plan that you are currently working on that we have not touched on, just to get an update on those parts?

Mr Steel: The thing that is underway that we have not touched on is the feasibility work on the future retrofitting of our existing depots for high-capacity electrical charging; and the future fourth depot on the north side that will not only help to meet the growing fleet needs of Transport Canberra more generally, but also be able to house electric buses. I refer also to the work that has been undertaken particularly with Evoenergy around some of the planning to make sure that we have the grid capacity. This is not just about buying electric buses; it is about all of the infrastructure, grid capacity and skills that are required to be able to support that. That is what the plan has really fleshed out for us.

I will hand over to Ben to talk a little bit about what is happening there—the discussions and the grid connection requests that we will be making soon in Woden to support that.

Mr McHugh: Minister, you nailed the three key pillars for success in our transition plan. The first part is infrastructure and making sure that we have the right types of facilities and the utility connections to ensure that we can charge, house and manage the buses. The second part is having the right technology and making sure that we are procuring the right technology. The third key piece is our people piece, to make sure that our mechanics and our workshops are skilled up, trained and able to operate this new technology to make sure that it is on the road every day. As they do with the diesel fleet, they need special qualifications to do that. We have started training and skilling up our staff this year. We have been working very closely with CIT and some TAFE organisations in other jurisdictions on developing that training course. That is in its first phase of rollout at the moment, and some of our staff are in that.

We will continue to deliver on those three key pillars to ensure that, when we get to the point of operating those buses—and we do expect, out of our lease procurement that was announced recently, to have our first electric buses on the road in the second half of this calendar year—they meet our expectations, meet the community's expectations and deliver a high-quality public transport service.

MS ORR: Minister, we briefly touched on this, but I want to get a better understanding of how public transport's operations and patronage have fluctuated during the last 12 months, given that we have been in the COVID health pandemic. With Transport Canberra, what have we seen as far as patronage and operations go, and how has Transport Canberra still supported members of our community who need to rely on or use public transport?

Mr Steel: While the public transport system has continued to operate throughout the pandemic, to ensure that essential workers in particular have been able to get around the city and go to work, even as restrictions have eased, whilst we have seen an increase in the number of people using public transport, it is still not back up to the levels that we saw just prior to the pandemic. We have been tracking that. Judith Sturman from Transport Canberra has some further detail about where we are at in terms of patronage at the moment.

Ms Sturman: Absolutely, we have had quite a roller-coaster journey over the last three years in terms of patronage, with COVID and the impacts. It is true to say that the beginning stages, where restrictions were put on and lifted, had an impact on how people responded. We saw a return to transport after the first wave, but then that collapsed again when we had the second wave. That has stayed with people for longer. I think people's habits, with working from home, have progressed and remained.

We are currently at around 60 per cent of where we were pre-COVID. Compared to just before we saw the sudden drop in patronage, today we are at 60 per cent of that figure. We were looking, for that year, at around 20 million journeys per year. Obviously, that has had a major impact on the number of people that are travelling.

Having said that, we have provided services for students, and students have been the group that have come back. About 70 per cent of students have returned and have consistently come back each term. This is school students rather than tertiary students. Obviously, that is a different situation, in that a lot of tertiary students have been receiving tutoring from home rather than in the colleges and education centres.

In other areas, for example, in community transport, we are seeing those numbers come back up again, so there are parts of the community that are using our services. Weekends are being utilised as well. We are seeing a general drop overall, but there is utilisation across the general normal peaks, off-peaks and weekends.

We are working very closely with other jurisdictions to understand and to share experiences and methods in order to start to encourage customers and to consider how we might invite people back onto transport. It is quite difficult, in that over two years a lot of people have either formed new habits in terms of using their cars or working from home. The government is now considering a campaign to try to drive that patronage back up.

That is the current status. Throughout the whole of the COVID period we have had a lot of measures that we have put in place across public transport to ensure that we have managed the highest level of safety and hygiene across the fleet of buses and light rail vehicles—increasing cleaning and maintaining that cleaning. We are also ensuring that we have the check-in codes—which, of course, we are now no longer using—and have really clear communication to customers to enable them to make their choices about travel.

MS ORR: Particularly in what would be traditionally the work commute hours, what sort of trend are you seeing? You said students are coming back, and weekend users are coming back. I want to get a better feel for weekday at peak times as opposed to

non-peak times.

Ms Sturman: With the profile for peak times, there are still the two, morning and evening, peaks. They have dropped by the equivalent percentage. If you imagine the profile of the two morning and evening peaks, with a lower level of travel in the middle of the day, the whole of that profile has dropped consistently across the profile. There are still people that depend on public transport to get to work, and those people have continued or have come back, but there are quite a large number that have decided—and this is also indicative of travel on the roads at the moment—to use their car or stay at home.

MS ORR: You said that you would be looking at running a campaign to get people back using the light rail. Is there any insight you can give into what sorts of things you will be looking at as part of that campaign?

Ms Sturman: With the main campaign, the best way to describe it is that it would be looking at perhaps re-educating people about what the offering is, what the availability of services is from different regional centres and the benefits of travelling on public transport, which people might not always be aware of or be focused on when they are in their cars. It is a campaign to re-energise people's ideas about how they travel.

Mr Steel: We will be closely guided by the health advice, which is outlined in our Transport Canberra recovery plan, with the steps around monitoring where we are at in terms of the pandemic. We are, of course, mindful of the fact that winter is coming and this year we may see an increase in flu, and a potential fourth wave as well. We always have to be guided by the health advice, and to make sure that people feel confident that they can return.

As Ms Sturman mentioned, it is about re-educating people about the transport system; some people may not have used it for two years. There have been hundreds of changes to the network during that period. There are new offerings that people may not have experienced, new benefits to the public transport system. We are looking at opportunities at the right time to be able to welcome people back and demonstrate to them those benefits of returning.

MR PARTON: There was a lot of wonderful information in that answer from Ms Sturman. I do not think I have missed this detail, so please excuse me if I have. When does Transport Canberra expect to restore the services to the pre-COVID timetable?

Mr Steel: That goes to when the health advice is right, and once we are confident that the pandemic is not impacting as much on the numbers of drivers who are furloughed. I will hand back to Judith to provide a bit of information about the current level of impact that we are seeing in the workforce. Of course, it is one of the driving factors about why we have an interim service, so that we can deliver reliable services at a time when there is still a health impact on Transport Canberra drivers, mechanics and other operational staff.

Ms Sturman: I might hand over to Ian McGlenn, the executive branch manager for

bus operations. As an introduction to that, I want to reinforce that the key to our operations is to ensure that we provide a reliable service for customers so that they know that they can get the buses that we advertise they can get. That is probably our key objective. When we have a situation which is a moving and emerging situation that maybe tests that reliability, taking the stance of retaining the interim timetable is the best outcome for our customers and ensures that reliability. I will hand over to Ian to give a little bit more in depth about how we are managing the actual workforce in bus operations.

Mr McGlinn: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. From the commencement of the pandemic, as it started to hit our workforce, we measured what we could do, as Judith referred to, to provide a reliable service. It was about withdrawing some of that additional service which was not warranted because of the fall in patronage, while also maintaining a span of hours that suited the whole community, to give them the ability to travel. Also, whilst we did not have social distancing on our fleet, it provided the ability to load share across all of the services that we provided—in a way, providing a de facto relationship.

In the early stages, when Lyneham high, Gold Creek schools, junior and senior, and Holy Spirit had those outbreaks, that affected our working community extensively. At the Belconnen depot we had 75 drivers away in a day, and that is above and beyond what is planned. That becomes very hard. You can borrow and scrape, and get people to do extra shifts, but you cannot continually do that. Obviously, as a bus is out on the road, it is scheduled to come back and go out and do other work. But if it stays out and does extra work, you will potentially have drivers there waiting to do work without a fleet.

What we recommended, and it was supported by the minister, was to reduce, to come to an interim network, which gives us a little bit of capacity to manage these day-to-day absences.

Across the workshops, we have split the workshops into two lots of movement. We have a morning team come in; they finish at just after 12 o'clock and a second team starts at one o'clock. There is no crossover or interaction, to minimise the spread.

With our drivers, we have had them coming in and then having to go out into the fleet as well. Our field transport officers and communications centre operators are working in bubbles, to minimise the crossover between ourselves, to minimise the chance of infection.

It is pleasing to say that, to date, at this time, we have had no workplace transmissions. We manage this on a day-to-day basis, where we are keeping an eye on how many people are away; we are managing the workload and making sure that we provide that reliability in service. Whilst for the service route overall there is a bit of a reduction, we are ensuring that the services—

MR PARTON: Mr McGlinn, that is a very extensive answer that you have given. In closing on this line of questioning—and it is probably more directed to the minister—how is it that every other city across Australia has managed to return to regular services? Surely, they are facing the same challenges that we have had. Why is it that

we are the only ones that have not returned to regular services at this stage?

Mr Steel: Many cities are still in the same position as us of running a slightly lower frequency timetable. We are monitoring this. We will be doing this in different periods. As we head into term 2, just ahead of that point, we will be checking in to see what the current health settings are, what Health is thinking about for the future and what the current level of staff impact is. It fluctuates; Mr McGlenn might be able to provide the current number of staff affected, to give you a sense of what it is at the moment, but it will change depending on where the pandemic is at. My priority is reliability, because even though there is a slightly reduced level of service in terms of frequency on some of the routes, we still have high capacity and high frequency, particularly on the rapids, for example, and still the same level of service on the weekend. Reliability has to be there because if people are going to wait for a service, they need to know that it will actually arrive. That will always be my priority in the system because it builds confidence in the system. The worst thing that could happen is to go back up to the previous level of service delivery and then find that we cannot deliver those services.

That would be the worst possible outcome, and that is why we have taken this approach. We are going to be conservative about it and we are going to check in as time progresses, as the pandemic progresses, to make sure that we can deliver the best service for Canberrans that is reliable.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I am really excited that we will be doing some shared path and footpath audits. We heard quite a bit about that in last year's hearings. We heard that the directorate had purchased the equipment they needed, the e-bikes they needed, to conduct the audits. I think we were expecting those audits to be completed by December last year, and I have not seen them. I am wondering where those audits are up to.

Mr Steel: I will hand over to TCCS to provide some further detail, but it is a massive job. Obviously, the Jobs for Canberrans employees have done an amazing job in getting out there to help audit over 3,000 kilometres of paths around the network. This is a real opportunity to assess the condition of our path network and to make improvements. We are also employing—on our roads, and we are looking at this for our path network as well—some of the latest technologies that might enable us to do this in a much more efficient way through the use of artificial intelligence technology that can automatically assess pavement conditions. There are future opportunities to do this type of work much more quickly. I will hand over to TCCS.

Ms Fraser: In relation to your comment about the path condition audits, the Jobs for Canberrans staff that were undertaking those condition assessments completed that work in about November or December last year. Our engineers are currently assessing the path condition audit data to inform what will become the proactive restoration projects for those paths based on the condition of the paths that were audited.

THE CHAIR: That is excellent progress. When will we get a public report of that or when will we see the audit? Will you do some public reporting on it?

Ms Fraser: Yes, there will be. We will release the findings. We have had a lot of

interest from stakeholder groups, particularly Pedal Power and the like, who are very interested to see the data findings. We are expecting that within the next few months. Unfortunately, due to some resourcing cuts with COVID, with our engineers and a diversion of resources to other priorities, we have not been able to finalise that. We are hoping within the next few months that we will have that available to the public.

THE CHAIR: That sounds great. I am hoping that we have it by the next hearings. That is good progress.

Ms Fraser: Yes.

MR PARTON: I am looking at page 25, objective 1, which is to drive an increase in patronage, which is something that we are all keen to do. One of the strategic objectives is to drive an increase in patronage, with works expected to begin on stage 2B of light rail soon. The question I have is: what will be the hourly maximum capacity of light rail services from Woden to Civic? Given one LRV every six minutes, I am assuming that answer is not going to be difficult to arrive at, even within this hearing. What would be the hourly maximum capacity of light rail services from Woden to Civic?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Duncan Edghill and the team from MPC to give some details. The peak frequency in the morning is every five minutes, headway, for light rail, so they come very frequently. They have about four times the amount of capacity as a normal bus. Clearly, this is a form of mass transit that we have not had before in Canberra. It will support the population growth that has already occurred in parts of Woden, and it will certainly happen into the future as well. I will hand over to MPC to provide some detail about the capacity.

Mr Edghill: Of course, we have not finalised contracts for stage 2B. The ultimate answer to this question would depend upon what is contracted in terms of frequency and so forth. When we are talking about capacity, there would be a distinction to be made between system capacity—the technical capacity of how many vehicles you could run at any one point in time—versus capacity based upon a peak timetable.

I would probably refrain from doing the maths in my head at the moment, but if we make an assumption about how many light rail vehicles there would be versus capacity of light rail vehicles, and multiplied it out, you would be getting closer to the answer. Of course, you would also have to take into account, if we are talking Woden to the city, both ways. I will take the exact question on notice, if I may, rather than attempting to do the maths in my head.

MR PARTON: I appreciate that, Mr Edghill. Yes, if you could take on notice what will be the hourly maximum capacity of light rail services from Woden to Civic, so we are only talking about the one direction. Additionally, I would like to know what is the maximum hourly capacity of the full timetable bus services from Woden to Civic. What I am talking about is pre-COVID and, when we look at the capacity of those vehicles and that timetable, I would like to know what that figure is. Once we get those figures, we can all have a look at the expected capacity difference.

Mr Steel: The other important point is that the two are not separate systems. It is one

integrated system that will work together, and operational planning will be undertaken on the integration later, in future years, ahead of the light rail stage 2 alignment being operational. That will support the number of journeys that need to be taken by customers, and that is buses and light rail working together with other modes of transport to support people to get to where they need to go.

MR PARTON: Along those lines, then—

Mr Steel: They are not mutually exclusive systems; they will actually work together. There has been no decision yet around terminating buses. We will still have, I expect, some rapid buses running, particularly from places like Weston Creek. We will be looking at where we can connect as much as possible to light rail to give people options, particularly to get off around the parliamentary triangle. That planning work is yet to occur, and no assumptions should be made about the termination of more bus routes at this time until that planning has been undertaken.

MR PARTON: I guess you do not want to have too many buses left, because they will be decidedly quicker and they may become the preferred option.

Mr Steel: No-one can stop currently between Curtin and the city, or get on a bus service at the moment, because there are no bus stops. So there is always a trade-off between accessibility and connecting to the right areas. The rapid buses do not currently run around Barton, so that people can get off at those employment hubs. It will be a different service, and the planning for that network will take place closer to the time of the operation beginning.

MS ORR: Minister, that goes a little bit towards the theme of what I was going to ask, which is why it may or may not be appropriate to say that a bus is like light rail, and they are offering the same thing. I know we had this debate around the Gungahlin one, and certainly there were quite a few differences in the implementation and the uptake of the use. Could you give us a bit of an idea of where you are looking to take the network under this extended light rail path, what sorts of opportunities there might be and why we would not necessarily say it is just uplifting one mode of transport for another, with no difference beyond that?

Mr Steel: MPC might be able to comment as well on some of the early thinking around 2B as work continues on the planning for the system. Certainly, with stage 1, that replaced what was a very popular bus service in terms of the red rapid that used to run down Northbourne Avenue. We have seen a very significant increase in patronage, certainly prior to the pandemic—there was up to a 30 per cent increase in the number of people using light rail services in the Gungahlin area; and a significant, around 20 per cent, increase in the inner north in terms of public transport use. It drove patronage in a way that a very successful bus system did not, and we are expecting that same benefit on the south side with stage 2.

Stage 2 will be slightly different to stage 1, in the sense that there are those overhead bridges that will connect people with the stations; we expect those stations will be in the median strip for stage 2. There will be a different way of connecting with the stations than with stage 1.

Like stage 1, though, we will be looking at the opportunities around improved path connections to those stops, and opportunities for park and ride to be able to access those stops. New park and rides have been put in for stage 1—most recently the Well Station Drive park and ride, for people to access light rail services.

We are looking forward to having, as part of the design process, station conversations with the community. Along the route, at each planned station stop, we would engage with the community around that and say, “How would you like to access the stop? What are the things that would facilitate the best possible connection with this new service?” That will help to inform the connections and other infrastructure that may be required to support people to be able to take up this new form of transport.

Mr Edghill: I am not sure whether you want me to comment, Minister.

Mr Steel: Please.

Mr Edghill: We are very conscious, as we are developing light rail stage 2, that it is not an either-or proposition with the buses; it is an integrated transport network that operates together. We are also very conscious that, even though we are building it between Woden and the city, it is not a light rail system that will travel just between Woden and the city. When you fill out the permutation, there are hundreds of different journeys which are possible—Parliament House to Dickson, Woden to Gungahlin and so forth.

It is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. There are pros and cons, of course, with both buses and light rail, and that is why we operate both. There are differences in terms of amenity. It is not just around capacity or journey time; there is a whole heap of other features. Of course, as with light rail stage 1, light rail is not simply about transport, as silly as that may sound; it is also a project which is assisting with the development of Canberra from a land perspective. Light rail does something very different to buses in that respect.

Once you have light rail, there is the permanence that comes with that, which is of benefit to those looking to invest in Canberra and invest in the corridor. Light rail also, as the minister mentioned, allows us to open up new travel possibilities. Particularly as 2B travels down Adelaide Avenue, where there are no stops at the moment, it does open up those new travel opportunities as well.

MS ORR: I want to get an update on e-scooters and how the expansion of the e-scooter program across all of Canberra is going, plus any focus that you might have on working with providers to improve safety and driver behaviour.

Mr Steel: Thanks. I will hand over to the team at TCCS to provide a bit of feedback on where we are at. We have announced an intention to expand the e-scooter scheme throughout Canberra, starting with certain connection points. The first stage is making better connections with Belconnen in particular, an existing region that has e-scooters but where there are not great connections to the city. We have seen an intention from many people, based on the data that has been collected, to make that journey, so we are looking at how we can facilitate that in the safest way. Then we will be looking at expansion to further districts, working with the providers on the numbers of scooters

that will be required in certain regions to facilitate that. I will hand over to the team to talk to where they are at with those discussions.

Mr Bowdery: As the minister pointed out, we are currently doing quite significant work on the connection between the inner north and Belconnen. We have been working closely with the providers and local key stakeholders in that area. We are currently engaged in some low-key consultation with land managers and we will be taking a final proposal to the Belconnen Community Council in the coming weeks, just to test some assumptions that we have.

The key focus on that is to identify any particular local issues that need to be addressed through some of the controls that we have with the providers. There are a number of geofencing controls that we can put in place to prevent parking in certain areas, for instance, and even to prevent the vehicles being moved into areas such as schools so that we are not conflicting with high pedestrian activity and creating any safety issues. We are doing that work with the local knowledge base there, those local land managers and key community stakeholders, to identify any of those issues. All being well, the intention is to complete that connection by the end of this month, and we are working with the providers on that.

Simultaneously—and I think this speaks to your question, Ms Orr, about the broader safety pieces we are looking at, the wider expansion—we have revisited our policy position in response to some of the recommendations which fell out of the review which the ACT government sponsored last year, which will give us a clearer focus on some of those geofencing controls, where we apply them, how we manage access to the devices, and how we balance the access and utility of the devices with other needs around our community paths and spaces.

That is looking at things like no park zones; there is potential consideration around curfews in certain areas, to prevent, as an example, starting a trip directly outside of Mooseheads late on a Friday night, where there is a high chance that somebody might be intoxicated. The idea there is not to prevent people from accessing the service and the devices; it is to remove the temptation from somebody who, left to their own devices, would probably jump in a cab. That might be the best solution for them.

We are looking at all sorts of components like that, but the key issue for the rollout will be repeating that engagement with local community areas, finding out where there are any issues, and avoiding potential challenges such as funnelling these devices onto main arterial roads, where we do not want them. We will be identifying priority crossings and making sure that our mapping and the controls that are on the devices are promoting people to use them in a safe way, in a way that does not create undue conflict with pedestrians and vulnerable road users and does not put them in harm's way on those major arterial roads.

MS ORR: Great; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I would like to have a bit of a chat about our driver rostering. We heard last hearings that we have a fairly low proportion of female drivers. We do have female drivers, but a fairly low proportion. We have got high willingness to increase that, but it does not seem to be happening naturally.

We have also heard that our rostering, the permanent rostering, is only Monday to Friday, so the current offering, if you want a permanent job as a bus driver, is that you can only work Monday to Friday and you do not really have options to work in different ways. Have you had a look at the rostering system and how that is affecting both our flexible offerings for bus drivers and our ability to service weekends?

Mr Steel: Yes. A detailed piece of work has been part of preparations for the current negotiations that are taking place with employee representatives on a new enterprise agreement to support an improved rostering system for Transport Canberra. I will hand over to Ben McHugh to talk about that shortly. There has also been a big focus on recruitment of new drivers in recent times; we have got an ageing workforce of drivers, some of whom are coming up to retirement, and we do need to make sure that there are new recruits coming into the system. We certainly welcome recruits from all different backgrounds and we are seeing a much more diverse workforce as a result of those recruitment rounds, which has changed the face of the workforce considerably.

There are a range of opportunities, currently, for people wanting to drive. Yes, there is part-time. Under the enterprise agreement, people start as a part-time driver before moving up to the full-time role. There are also casual opportunities that fit in around other job arrangements if people have multiple jobs or other responsibilities, carer responsibilities, for example, so there are different ways to move into the workforce that might end up leading to other pathways. Ben McHugh and Ian McGlenn can talk further about the work that has been undertaken there.

Mr McHugh: Thanks, Minister. To expand on that a little bit, to be fair, COVID has constrained our ability to deliver a range of things that were in progress over the last couple of years, such as offering “come and try days” targeted at female bus drivers or particular recruitment campaigns that make Transport Canberra an attractive place for a more diverse group of workers. You are right: we do still have only around 10 per cent of our workforce that is female, but we have definitely made some big strides in the cultural diversity of the workforce to ensure that it reflects the community that it serves. It absolutely is Transport Canberra’s ongoing ambition to have a diverse and inclusive workplace that reflects the community it serves.

I think that provides people with a confidence in the service and the system, moving forward. Bus drivers and the workforce suffer a bit from the legacy of a male-dominated industry or male-dominated job. We know we are on a journey, moving towards having a more inclusive workforce. We do have targeted approaches to achieve that and we will continue to put those forward and try to attract more females. It is, to a degree, a role that is not as flexible in its work hours as we would like, and in our future negotiations as part of our enterprise bargaining agreement we will be exploring how to make it a more attractive workplace for people who have different personal circumstances.

THE CHAIR: I am really glad to hear that. Is that work likely to lead to permanent part-time options where there are lots of different amounts of days, on weekends as well as weekdays, all of those different configurations, if somebody wants to work permanent part-time rather than working casually?

Mr McHugh: Yes, all of those options are currently being explored and are on the table, and we will look to have that discussion with the workforce over the next six to 12 months.

MR PARTON: I have a question about light rail generally. Minister, in terms of our current light rail services, can you tell us whether the light rail stage 1 construction contractors have completed rectifying all of the faults and construction failures since light rail operation commenced? I can give you the only additional question I have, so that we do not have to go backwards and forwards. Are you able to tell us whether light rail stage 1 has a full operating certificate issued, without any conditions from the light rail safety authority, or is it operating with certain conditions that need to be met or rectified to allow the service to operate at this current date?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Duncan Edghill to talk to the defects of light rail stage 1.

MR PARTON: If you need me to repeat any of that, Mr Edghill, I am quite happy to.

Mr Edghill: No, thank you. If I may, I just want to check with my colleagues in TCCS in case they want to answer. There is a shared responsibility now that we are in operations in this field, so we work very, very closely with our colleagues in TCCS.

Ms Playford: Happy for you to start, Duncan, and Jo Dawson can assist if there is any further detail that is required.

Mr Edghill: Fantastic. On that basis, I will ask my colleague Ash Cahif to kick off this answer.

Mr Cahif: Thank you, Duncan. I confirm that I have read and understood the privilege statement. Mr Parton, in response to your question, there are still deferred works on the stage 1 system, which is not unusual for a light rail system that is built. We will take on notice exactly an itemisation of what they are. None of them affect the safe operation of the system. The ONRSR, being the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, granted the certificate in order for operations to commence. I would have to take on notice whether there are any conditions—it is not unusual to have ongoing conditions—and we can come back to you with that answer.

MR PARTON: All right. I look forward to it.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I am interested in the annual report, noting that government is consulting with ACTCOSS about our flexible on-demand service for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Can you give us an update on where that is up to and when it might be delivering results?

Mr Steel: Thank you. I am really happy to give an update on this one. This is a really exciting project to look at the future of on-demand transport and what the opportunities are for Transport Canberra. We have run a flexible bus system for some time now. This is a system which, I think, most people recognise could be improved for people with mobility issues, people with disability and older Canberrans, in terms of the time that it operates, how the service is called for by patrons and what opportunities there are to deliver a more efficient service, as well as potentially

expanding services to Canberrans.

Last year we formed the accessibility reference group for Transport Canberra and City Services that brought together a range of different stakeholders that support some of the most vulnerable people in our community—representatives of carers, older people, people with a disability, as well as a range of other groups. ACTCOSS is, of course, involved as well. They have a range of different projects that they will be consulted on. I really appreciate their work, because there are a lot of them where we would really like their input to make sure that we have accessible transport systems in particular, but also on our other City Services infrastructure projects.

This is one area where we have formed a sub-working group of the accessibility working group that is going to be providing feedback on this specific piece of work because it is so critical for those user groups. The consultant for the feasibility work has now been appointed. They are going to be engaging significantly with the accessibility working group and with Transport Canberra as we develop a feasible model for on-demand transport.

We have seen some pilots operate in other jurisdictions, but we understand that this is actually the first time that a city has looked at providing a specific on-demand transport system for this user group. Other on-demand transport systems, like the pilots that were run in the Northern Beaches with the Cooe service, for example, which is generally quite well regarded, have been for the general community. With this service we are looking at a specific group. We are really interested in what the possibilities of this service are, whether there are any groups that we are missing in the current service and how we can build a better service to meet the needs of this user group. I will hand over to Transport Canberra and City Services to talk a bit further about the project and what we are hoping to deliver.

Mr McHugh: Thanks, Minister. I might ask Judith Sturman to talk to this particular item. She is leading the project.

Ms Sturman: Thanks, Ben. Thanks, Minister. This is a very exciting project. I think what we have learned over the few weeks that we have engaged the consultancy is that they will bring a very broad and deep understanding of the on-demand and flexible market from across Australia to apply to what we need to deliver in Canberra. The people that are involved have extensive experience in Canberra, as well as other states in Australia. They understand the complexities of our city, so there are probably a number of key focus points that they will be looking at. One is the nature of the satellite suburbs of Canberra and how to make sure that we can offer a service that will be commensurate with providing what people need. That is one immediate challenge. As the minister has indicated, it is probably not what any other state has looked at.

The other factor is that we have a very broad breadth of needs to look at and consider in terms of stakeholders. At the moment we offer a very, very bespoke service to people that need to attend hospital appointments or have shopping trips and their only means of transport is provided by us, with that door-to-door provision. That is probably one extreme on the continuum of what an on-demand flexible service can be. The other end of the continuum is more to provide a service that goes from point to

point, where people can access it at their will. That is all part of how the whole process will be reviewed. The critical thing is to look at doing this in stages and not try to find a solution quickly, as we will need to learn as we go along and make sure that we consider all the stakeholder inputs.

As the minister mentioned, the accessibility reference group started last year. This is one of the key focuses for this group. It is important because we want to make sure that we capture a wide breadth of people who need this service. It is about understanding very clearly what it is that is successful and what will bring the people to use this service, and use it well, so that we can see a value for money system that answers people's needs. That is a really critical outcome for the process.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr Steel: The long and short of it is that ACTCOSS is on the sub-working group—

Ms Sturman: Absolutely, yes.

Mr Steel: that is looking at this project under the accessibility working group.

THE CHAIR: Yes. It all sounds very promising. I am hoping we will see something delivered this term, but it sounds like we are moving in that direction.

MR PARTON: Bus procurements is where I am. Minister, you have recently made some announcements on bus procurements and undertaken a number of procurement actions. In the annual reports period, procurements were made for 26 diesel buses and eight electric buses, followed by your announcement to lease 12 electric buses and a market invitation for 90 electric buses. In relation to the 12 electric buses, I know there has been some explanation of this, but can I get you to explain and talk us through why two suppliers have been selected?

Mr Steel: You will appreciate, Mr Parton, that procurements are at arm's length from ministers, as they should be. I will hand over to Ben McHugh to talk about the procurement for the first round of buses.

Mr McHugh: Thanks, Minister. Due to probity reasons, as we are in the final stages of the contract finalisation piece, I can only speak at a higher level. What we identified through the procurement process is that there are different technologies that put different demands on our networks and systems. Different battery technologies, for example, have a different draw and demand; different buses have different physical geometry that allows them to access different spaces and be charged from different points.

Through the evaluation of the tenders submitted, an opportunity arose to increase our procurement of electric buses from the planned eight up to 12. That also came with a commitment to grow the fleet, associated with the network growth out to service Whitlam as well, so additional funding was provided in the last budget to allow us to do that. That funding was combined with our existing bus replacement program funding to allow us to procure 12 buses. The differences in technology that were presented in the tender also provided an opportunity to increase that number to 12.

That is probably as far as I can go at this particular stage, given where we are in the contract signing process.

MR PARTON: Mr McHugh, I am not sure whether you are the right one to ask, but wouldn't the selection of a single supplier have been more cost-effective in terms of operations and maintenance and spare parts requirements and the like?

Mr McHugh: In the leased scenario that we have gone with as our commercial arrangement, no. That is why that opportunity existed. The commercial arrangements around that, which obviously are subject to those contracts, allowed us the ability to test two different vehicles through that lease process. If you look at the history, there have been a number of different bus manufacturers.

The tradition is that, in the procurement of buses, you take the best bus offered at that particular point in time on the basis that the specifications that we put out in those tenders are specific enough to ensure that we can operate effectively any bus that is provided within the system and the network. We are confident that testing two different electric bus manufacturers through the first procurement process is a safe and sound way to go.

MR PARTON: Finally, are we still on track to have a full fleet of 90 in operation by 2024?

Mr McHugh: At this stage, we are looking to have the 90 additional battery electric buses in our system by the end of 2024. That is still our plan, yes.

Mr Steel: I note that the zero emissions transition plan anticipated 80 buses at the time. We are going out for 90, so we are exceeding what was put in the plan. That goes out into 2025. That is what the original plan said of that particular tranche of buses. We have been able to get the 12 leased electric buses, which is a great outcome and, again, was not anticipated in the zero emissions transition plan.

MR PARTON: All right. Thank you, Minister.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I have a couple of questions about footpath and shared path repairs. They are fairly short questions. What is the gap between somebody reporting a need through Fix My Street and it being repaired? We often get a request that the forward proactive maintenance list be published, because then people know what is coming up and they do not need to constantly report it. Can the list for what is coming up for 12 months be published?

Mr Steel: I will hand over to Shelly Fraser, from Roads ACT, to talk further about the process. There is a range of different factors. Obviously, safety is a key feature. That often results in some paths being repaired sooner. That means sometimes those paths are prioritised above those that may be on the list currently and have been previously identified. So the list does move around, and it needs to. I guess there is a risk in terms of publishing a list, in that it may set expectations for the community about paths being repaired or new paths being delivered, when in fact things change around because of safety issues that have arisen.

Another factor is that, in order to ensure the efficient delivery of some of the construction work, the paths are often packaged up. We do not necessarily go out and seek a contract for one specific path upgrade; we might package together five or 10 of them in one, in order to get better value for money for government, and do them all at once. It might take a little bit longer, in order to wait to deliver those projects as a package. I will hand over to Shelly to provide some further detail about the process.

Ms Fraser: Yes, as Minister Steel mentioned, in relation to the path infill priority list, it is a continually moving and updated list that we work through as we receive requests from the community for new paths or for upgrades to paths. The path infill list is developed and assessed as we get requests from the public. As Minister Steel mentioned, we take into consideration a range of factors, including demand, proximity to community facilities like schools and shops, public transport, and the strategic cycling network plans or connectivity active travel plans that we are working on.

In regard to making it publicly available, it would almost be changing every day, so I am not sure whether it would be beneficial to the public to have a continually changing list published on our website.

THE CHAIR: Would it really be changing on a daily basis, though? If we are packaging the jobs up and contracting them out in batches, surely, once you have done that, you have a bit of certainty that those ones will go ahead?

Ms Fraser: There is a point in time at which we package up the priority list, which, subject to capital funding, is normally around 20 sites—20 to 50; sometimes 100, depending on the scope of the works. At that point in time they are packaged, assessed, put forward and delivered through our capital works team. Those paths are then taken off the list at that point in time, and the list continues on for that next round of investment, usually within a year.

Mr Steel: One of the things we could look at is perhaps publishing on a website which paths we are going to do the work on, so that people understand which ones are going to be funded through those packages ahead of time, so that they know that we are moving on them.

THE CHAIR: That might be quite helpful. It would be great if you could have a look at whether that is feasible.

Ms Fraser: Yes, we can look into that.

MR PARTON: Will all of the Renault buses be retired by the end of this year, and will the fleet be fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act by that time? That is my simple closing question.

Mr Steel: Yes, that is certainly the intention. The buses that we have announced for lease, both low and lower emissions buses, will be delivered in 2021 to enable us to retire those, ready for our deadline of 2022 for DDA compliance. It is not the only area where we are looking at DDA compliance. We have also been undertaking, for a number of years—actually, for a decade—a piece of work to update all of the bus stops as well, so that they are accessible for people to use. That has again been based

on this time line of 2022, to enable us to have an accessible transport system for all.

THE CHAIR: Minister and officials, thank you very much for your time today and for your information and answers. Answers to questions taken on notice will need to be with the secretariat within five days. Our secretariat will be chasing you up and helping you with that. We will return to the hearing at 2 pm with Minister Berry.

Hearing suspended from 1.55 to 2.14 pm.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Dietz, Mr John, Chief Executive Officer, Suburban Land Agency

Bulless, Mr Neil, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Suburban Land Agency

Holt, Mr Nicholas, Executive Director, Built Form and Divestment, Suburban Land Agency

Tennent, Mr Simon, Development Director, Molonglo, Suburban Land Agency

Gordon, Mr Tom, Executive Director, Development Delivery, Suburban Land Agency

Piper, Ms Mayumi, Senior Director, Community Development and Engagement, Suburban Land Agency

Sendaba, Ms Bethel, Executive Branch Manager, Planning and Urban Policy

THE CHAIR: Welcome, Minister and officials. Thank you very much for joining us. We will be talking today to Minister Berry about housing strategy and policy, suburban land development and the Suburban Land Agency. I will be very happy for members to ask questions on any of those topics when it is their turn to ask a question.

Can I get a thumbs up from around the room, virtually or physically, from everyone who might speak today that you have received, read and understand the privilege statement? Minister, you have obviously read and seen one?

Ms Berry: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. We are not having opening statements, so I will ask the first question. Minister, I am interested in block 17, section 152 in the Belconnen CBD. We have a development going on there, an SLA development, and we have about 550 units there, but only 10 of them are planned to be public housing dwellings. That looks quite low to us, given the location of that facility. It looks like a really good location for public housing because it is so close to the bus interchange and various things. Are you able to tell us why that allocation has been made that way and whether that might increase?

Ms Berry: I can give you a little bit on that, but it is in the public housing space, in the committee hearing before this one. It is about making sure that we meet the needs of individual public housing tenants in the allocation of public housing. We purchase or build public housing in places where it is required and meets tenants' needs. But the decisions around how much, or whether it will meet the need of the allocations for public housing, is really in another space. I can get John Dietz, the CEO of the Suburban Land Agency, to provide a bit of information about that.

Mr Dietz: Thank you, Minister. You are correct. There is within government a team which looks at the housing targets, which are then defined in a notifiable instrument.

That team is driven by CSD, the Community Services Directorate, as well as EPSDD. We, the SLA, are part of that team to make sure that things are realistic on the delivery, but we really react to the requirement that is required. The question is probably better directed, as the minister said, to CSD.

THE CHAIR: I have another question on the same site. We know that it is being auctioned. What place-making requirements will go along with that auction and how will we make sure that Belconnen gets the highest quality development there—not just the highest value at auction or the highest financial price?

Ms Berry: Mr Dietz can go through a whole lot of detail of what occurred before we got to this point, in making sure that we had feedback from the community, from the Belconnen town centre community and more broadly cross the city as well. Mr Dietz, it might be helpful for the committee to understand that process.

Mr Dietz: I will probably ask Tom Gordon to go through that in a little bit more detail. I think you would recognise, too, that individual sites have quite complex relationships with the requirements that we have. You will note that Belconnen lakeshore, just next to it, has gone through a significant place-making process. Because the site that we are talking about now has actually been released before, and there were substantial processes that were involved in the consultation on that release, as well as feedback from the actual failed release process that we have then incorporated into this release, we have not gone through the same type of process that you would have seen at the Belconnen lakeshore. I will ask Tom Gordon to provide a little more detail about the history of consultation on that site.

THE CHAIR: In the interests of time, I might intervene. I have heard the history of the consultation, and that is great. To make sure we are getting that high quality, place-making outcome, rather than the highest financial price, is that based on the offering we put out in the auction?

Mr Dietz: Yes, that is correct. You will note that the actual contract of sale does include some specifics around the requirement for the builder to deliver. Those requirements are things like needing to be an electric building, each of the car parks needing to have 32 amp power supplies, affordable housing targets and public housing targets. Those requirements are made very specific as part of the contract of sale, so that the tenderer, or the person who bids at the auction, knows exactly the expectations required.

THE CHAIR: That is great. Is that the kind of technique that we will be using? We have a parliamentary and governing agreement commitment to deliver the highest quality outcomes, not the highest value at auction. Is that how we will be doing it? Will we be doing it through the specifications in contracts for sale?

Ms Berry: The work of the government's Suburban Land Agency, the SLA, has been to make sure that that is the very purpose. We were happy to include the work that has already been committed to by the Suburban Land Agency in making sure that we get the best possible outcome for the community, which might not always be the financial one, and now it has been added in to the paper, which is great. Mr Dietz can perhaps talk through the Suburban Land Agency's work around place-making and place

design-making processes, which we have been doing for a number of years.

Mr Dietz: I am very happy to. Thank you, Minister. You are correct; in order to ensure that we are not just going out and getting the highest financial return and that we are appropriately optimising finance, environmental and social, we really work with the community. We sit down from the very beginning of a release of mainly the complex sites, to ensure that we understand the history, to ensure we understand, and the stakeholders understand, the current uses, and they help us to find the vision for that site. That becomes part of the requirements that we then tender on.

Your point is that we might not always go through the full place-making process, depending on the complexity of the site. If we are selling to a mum and dad, then the ability to balance and optimise the financial, environmental and social returns is captured in the Territory Plan. In some of the more significant or complex sites, we see the benefit of working with the community to get the specific outcome required from the community to balance each of those factors.

THE CHAIR: That development will be all electric?

Mr Dietz: That is right, yes. That is known in the requirement.

MR PARTON: In the annual report at page 18, “market”, the demand for detached housing blocks has grown, clearly, beyond the land release, with not enough blocks being offered for purchase by SLA. That is evident in the Taylor ballot, and more recently in the Macnamara ballot, where only 71 blocks, of which I think 27 were RZ1, had just under 8,800 registered applicants, which gave each person roughly a 0.8 per cent chance of obtaining a block. Minister, what is this government doing to ensure that people wishing to build and live in their own home—not an apartment or townhouse—have the opportunity to do so?

Ms Berry: We have a housing strategy, which you will have seen, and you will have been part of some of the consultation process in the early days of the development of that strategy. That goes to a number of policies and frameworks that the ACT government is committed to, to provide housing for everyone across a range of different areas.

I understand that the Chief Minister, before a committee previously, talked in great detail about the dwellings that the Suburban Land Agency is aiming to provide through the Indicative Land Release Program, and that the ACT government’s delivery commitment is around two per cent of the whole of the ACT’s commitment to land development. In fact, that number of housing or land that has been committed to as part of the Indicative Land Release Program has increased by over 2,000 dwellings since the last program.

There has been no slowdown from the Suburban Land Agency in making sure that land is continuing to be developed. However, given that land is finite, that it is not available forever, and that whilst 50 years ago land may have been relatively free, of course, these days, it is not free, because it is more scarce, and we need to manage that carefully. Managing a planned city like Canberra is not a simple or easy task, and we need to make sure that the land is provided in a way so that it can continue to be

provided for future generations to enjoy, while also taking into account that we want to make sure that we keep our bush capital environment, and that we acknowledge the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage around our city and on Ngunnawal land.

That is why the government has committed to a policy of moving towards 70-30, which will still provide opportunities for people to live in homes that meet their needs, but takes into account some of those other challenges that we are now facing as a city. I can ask Mr Dietz to provide a little bit more detail about how we are releasing land compared to private developers in the ACT.

Mr Dietz: I will reiterate some of the points that the minister made around the complexity of delivering land. It is a complex process, and for all the right reasons. We want to ensure that, as we do deliver land, we are keeping the high standards that are required within the community, and ensuring that we go through the processes of due diligence, ensuring that heritage and culture are taken into account, ensuring that geological studies are taken into account.

Even given these complexities, as the minister said, the SLA has been doing very well to deliver land as per the ILRP—until two years ago, delivering land that actually resulted in a good 400 or so blocks, at the end of financial year 2020, available over the counter that people were not actually purchasing. COVID was an unforeseen event, and we have had a reaction that has been unprecedented in the demand that has come.

The quality of the processes required by the SLA to continue to deliver against the ILRP remain; we continue to need to go through those complex processes, and we remain on track.

MR PARTON: Minister, the Chief Minister asserted earlier in the week that the blowout in demand and the blowout in prices for some vacant land has no effect whatsoever on the rest of our residential market. I would put it to you, Minister, that the Chief Minister's assertion is blatantly ridiculous, in that, with the 8,800 people that missed out on the ballot, where is it that you think they will go looking next? Of course, it is going to have an effect on the rest of the market. I would put it to you, Minister, that Mr Barr's assertion is blatantly silly.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, be careful about parliamentary language, but the question is fine.

Ms Berry: Thank you, Chair. I was wondering whether there was in fact a question or whether Mr Parton was just putting forward a point of view—which is fine, if that is his point of view. The Chief Minister made some valid points in his appearance before the committee earlier, and we have just reiterated those.

MR PARTON: Can I briefly rephrase it: is it your belief that the blowout in demand and the price for vacant land in the ACT have an effect on the rest of the residential market in the ACT?

Ms Berry: No, I do not think it is the case that you can compare new land that is being developed in other parts of the city with land that has already been developed. It

is a whole different proposal. I think that was the point the Chief Minister was attempting to make. You have a different perspective, and that is fine. That is why you are in the opposition. But that is not the case. That is not how we think a comparison can be fairly made.

Of course, the housing market as it is, and the challenges that are being faced in the ACT, are not just issues that are being faced in the ACT; they are being faced across the country. Every state and territory is experiencing these challenges, and the last two years have provided some complexities that did not exist previously.

Different measures have been put in place that have meant that more people have been able to purchase homes or have wanted to purchase homes—making the decision to do so—than was the case two years ago. It is about having more savings, lower interest rates, and people deciding to purchase a home rather than going on a holiday. That is anecdotal, but that is definitely the experience that we have. For the first time in a decade, we had over 400 dwellings available, as Mr Dietz pointed out. They sold quickly, and now we are seeing land selling very fast as well, as we have seen with the experience here in the ACT and across the country more generally. I do not think you can make comparisons without taking into account the extraordinary times that we have been in.

MR CAIN: Supplementary, Chair?

THE CHAIR: Yes, Mr Cain. I see your hand there. If you have a supplementary, you can ask one supplementary, and please do make sure that it is a question and it covers a new line.

MR CAIN: A supplementary, you mean?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I am just saying please make sure that it relates to this questioning but that it is eliciting new information and not merely repeating information that we have already heard.

MR CAIN: Minister, you have mentioned 400 dwellings. I would like you to tell me the proportion of those dwellings that are detached housing, even as a percentage. It is very clear that the extraordinary demand is for detached housing, as we saw in both Taylor and Macnamara.

Ms Berry: We might have to take that question on notice to provide that detail and the breakdown that you are referring to. However, as we keep explaining, the ACT government Suburban Land Agency is responsible for two per cent of the dwelling supply in the ACT. Ninety-eight per cent is provided by private providers. So we are only two per cent, a very small part of that. Of that two per cent, we can do the breakdown for you and get that information.

However, just to be clear, the Suburban Land Agency has not held back in its development of new suburbs and land for release. It has continued its program of works, despite the challenges over the last couple of years. That has not been the case for some private developers, who have been able to make a decision to hold back land supply. So the government is definitely doing its bit with the two per cent of land that

it provides development opportunities for. To put that into perspective, Mr Cain, it is only two per cent of the market, and we can provide the breakdown of that two per cent.

MR CAIN: The market completely disagrees with your position, Minister.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I did say one supplementary.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: If you have another question you can hold it for your next turn.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

MS ORR: Minister, can I get an update on how the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme is progressing?

Ms Berry: Yes. Thank you, Ms Orr. I am not sure who is in the office there. Is that Bethel? Can you provide some detail on the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme?

Ms Sendaba: Yes. Thanks, Minister. The Affordable Home Purchase Scheme is established specifically to match prospective purchasers with properties that are made available through the annual targets that are set. We have a goal overall to achieve a 15 per cent target of planned release each year set aside for public, community and affordable housing. The home purchase program allows interested buyers who meet the respective eligibility criteria to register with the SLA, who then make available properties through that scheme. I am not sure if my colleagues from the SLA have any information that they could provide around numbers of people who have registered for the program or results to date?

Mr Dietz: Yes, definitely. Thank you, Bethel. In the interests of time, I will hand straight to Nick Holt to talk through some of the more recent releases that we have had there.

Mr Holt: Yes, I can give you a bit of an update on progress of the implementation of the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. The agency, over the last 12 to 18 months, has had a focus on improving the customer experience for people registered to participate in the scheme, providing a broader range of opportunities through the scheme, such as diversifying more products into things such as house and land packages. It has also had a focus on increasing the number of participants in the scheme.

As of February, last month, we have had just over 4,000 people express an interest in the scheme and, of those 4,000, just over 600 have become eligible through the scheme. As properties have become available to be offered to the database, we have been providing those. I have some stats on what we have done over the last 12 months, if you are interested to hear a little bit about that. I will take some direction.

MS ORR: Yes.

Mr Holt: Since January 2021 we have had over 15 developments offered to the database. Of those 15, seven have been completed. Overall, of those seven that were completed, they were offering 117 dwellings to the database. Most of those were historical sales or land releases. Most of them are unit developments. Of those 117 dwellings, 34 were sold. We have ongoing sales with another eight developments, of which 180 dwellings are being offered through the database. Those sales are ongoing and we have had 42 sales already with those. Predominantly, the most popular ones are through the house and land packages, which are moving very fast.

The unit ones are not moving as fast, but there are probably some reasons behind that. With the unit dwellings, they are offered off the plan and they have to compete with the existing housing market. So they are competing against units that are in the market, of which there are a lot available. Eligible buyers have to make a choice about whether they are going to wait the one and a half to two years for a unit development to come on, or whether they are going to take a unit that is currently available in the existing market. We think that is one of the reasons why the unit uptake is probably a little bit slower. Having said that, we have had a recent release in Coombes where we have had very high interest, out of the database, from people for that unit development.

MS ORR: Chair, I think that covered everything I wanted. There is a lot of data there. I might go back and check the transcript.

MR CAIN: Could you explain how land sale ballots work, Minister, and explain how transparency in that process is achieved?

Ms Berry: Thanks, Mr Cain. This is always a very good question, for people who are not involved in the ballot process or the land sale process to understand how that works. I will ask Mr Dietz to take the committee through that process.

Mr Dietz: The ballot process is definitely around ensuring equity in an open and transparent way. Mr Bulless, I will hand to you, just to make sure that we can walk through that process in a more detailed fashion, to specifically answer Mr Cain's question.

Mr Bulless: All the information about the ballot process is on our website. It lists the steps that happen through the ballot process. Fundamentally, we communicate with the community through a series of internet posts, through our mail and through posts to our website to alert people that a ballot is forthcoming. The ballot process will open. People will enter that process by registering their personal details. Once that process is finished, we do a check of the integrity of the data. When we are happy with that, there will be a process by which the ballot will be ordered, from one to whatever. We have the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission participate in that process to oversee the integrity of the randomised draw. We publish those results on our website.

We also communicate with our database for whatever suburb that might be related to. At some point down the track, after that process is finished, we then do a process of reviewing. For the most recent Whitlam ballot process, we looked at, through our lawyers, 400 of the top ballot draw numbers. What we are doing there is related party checks to eliminate people who may have got through our smart form process into the ballot draw.

Once we have done that process, we then advise our customers of the order, which is finalised and made public. People then, if they wish to pursue their opportunity, will be offered an appointment. In the case of Whitlam, we have 101 blocks and we have offered 208 appointments. In terms of how the ballot is resolved, as of next Monday, when the ballot for Whitlam will be undertaken, because we are doing this in a COVID-19 sensitive way, we will be doing this by telephone. So we will phone people, in the order in which they were drawn, to offer them an opportunity to purchase a block.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Obviously there is some degree of in-process compliance checking. Do you do an audit of what you call transparency and equity after the completion of a particular ballot?

Mr Bulless: In terms of audit, I am not sure whether you mean going through each and every individual person registered, or whether the process operated as we expected. After each ballot event and after every sales event, we have an internal debrief. The various teams within the agency will come together and analyse the outcomes. We will consider if there are any technical issues that have occurred during the process. At very limited times, that has happened in the past. If you are asking do we interrogate the credentials of every person registering, whether they are a valid person really wanting to buy a block of land to build a house, no, we do not go to that level of detail.

MR CAIN: How do you confirm related parties bidding for parcels, to arguably acquire multiple parcels for one entity?

Mr Bulless: There is a series of tests. The first stage test is the registration process. We have a smart form that analyses the data of registrants. It goes through 16 different fields, if you are an individual, to match that data against other data that is already within the database—people who have already registered. So if it is the same telephone number, address, name, date of birth, licence number or passport, it will trigger that as a flag. In the process of that, if you have enough flags, that will persist and will stop you, and you will need to contact the SLA to resolve that issue.

If you get through the process to the related party checks, our lawyers will confirm your personal details and confirm whether it is a person and his spouse, if they live in the same place, because we do not allow a husband and wife, or a husband and a child, or a husband and a relative, for example, to participate individually in the ballot.

MR CAIN: Do you do a check of, for example, a company having made a bid? Do you check then against majority shareholders and directors of that same entity?

Mr Bulless: On the face of it, the answer is, yes, we do look at the directors of a company, but if I could, Mr Cain, I will take that on notice and provide a more fulsome response than that.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. I would love to have a bit of a chat, Minister, about block

scraping. We heard from the design review panel for Molonglo, some time ago, that they recommended against block scraping and that it gave better environmental outcomes when we followed the landscape. I have heard similar things from the SLA quite frequently. Yesterday we had the EPA before us, and the EPA indicated that block scraping is actually a standard technique that developers are using on individual blocks and also on large developments. The EPA also told us that they were not recommending restoration of the topsoil after the block was scraped, because the topsoil was then washing into the waterways.

So I am a bit confused about whether we are allowing block scraping routinely, whether we are not, whether we are restoring the topsoil, and how we are making sure that that is done in an environmentally sensitive manner?

Ms Berry: Thank you. I will ask Mr Dietz to talk through that in a little bit of detail, and perhaps Mr Gordon as well.

Mr Dietz: I note that Molonglo is currently looking at being very much at the forefront in ensuring that we are managing the techniques of environmental management into a water catchment area like the Murrumbidgee. I am going to hand to Simon Tennant, who is the program director for the Molonglo area, to provide some greater detail on that. Thank you.

Mr Tennent: We talked about this at the last hearing, and specifically about the measures that we have put in place in Whitlam. Those measures are now being closely examined for rollout for future development in some other projects that we have got going close to the river corridor as well, particularly with some of the infrastructure projects.

Quite specifically, when it comes to block scraping—I am sure Mr Gordon will chime in with regard to estate development—there are certainly some requirements of a technical nature in building a suburb. It requires gradients to be of a certain gradient. The Suburban Land Agency take this very seriously in trying to minimise the amount of cut and fill that occurs across estate developments. But there are, particularly in Molonglo, areas where it just cannot be avoided. As a measure to try and minimise the impact of that, certainly topsoil is retained.

I hear what you are saying about some of it being washed into the river. That is certainly not our experience in Whitlam. We put in place measures over and above what is required when it comes to managing that outflow. We are also funding water monitoring devices, monitoring the quality of the water that is currently leaving Whitlam. That particular project is being peer reviewed by an external consultant, and the measures that we have put in place have made quite a difference. We have been working closely both with the EPA and with EPSDD.

In summary, there are many measures that we now have in place and they are yielding good results. I am not sure what the rest of the private development sector are doing. Up in Denman Prospect, I am not sure what their results are. But the SLA are very committed to making sure that, if we do block scrape, we carefully manage all of the material that has been removed and make sure that it does not impact on the waterways. I might hand over quickly to Tom, if you have got some additional

comments there.

Mr Gordon: Yes, as Simon was saying, we are very keen on retaining as much topsoil as we can, given that naturally across the territory there are areas of topsoil that are quite thin. We try and retain as much as possible so that it can be included in public open space but also on the block. We redress the individual housing blocks and then we come through with what we call a temporary grassing measure to hold that topsoil in place. This all occurs as part of the full package of construction works that we do.

THE CHAIR: Can I just clarify, for private developments, who would be responsible for the policy about block scraping and topsoil? Would that be the EPA or would that be the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development? I just want to check where I can follow up.

Mr Gordon: Just on that, they would follow the same level of scrutiny that the SLA does. I would be a bit surprised if they were doing something different. Certainly, the EPA have a keen interest on all the sites. It might be a question to the EPA about how they perceive some of the private developers.

THE CHAIR: Great. That covers it.

MR PARTON: I know we have touched briefly in this hearing on the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme, but the EPSDD report, page 82, under recommendation 6 of Auditor-General's report No 4, 2020, *Residential Land Supply and Release*, states that the directorate reviewed the affordable home purchase program and found that the program is limited by the blocks of land identified and the difficulty to deliver single dwelling homes on the smaller blocks within the price threshold. My question specifically is what is being done to consider changing the thresholds to be able to genuinely deliver single dwelling homes?

Ms Berry: Thanks, Mr Parton. I might just kick off here. I was going to provide during a previous question—I think it was asked by Ms Orr—some of the detail of the house and land packages that are available as part of the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. I understand that, unless you are standing in front of it, you might not actually realise that there are these blocks available. Particularly in Whitlam, there are a number of blocks available that there was a ballot for over the last year. For some of those, the sales still have not been concluded. However, there were 50 or 60 three-bedroom house and land packages available late last year. I am not sure where those purchases are up to or whether that is continuing. Mr Holt might be able to provide some more detail on the question with regard to the policy for affordable housing purchases.

Mr Holt: Thanks, Minister. To give you an update on those house and land packages, there were 105 house and land packages in Whitlam, of which over 70 have now either exchanged or are in settlement. Those projects are well and truly underway. There are another 79 house and land packages in Taylor that have just started being released to the database as well. They have been very popular. So quite a lot of single residential house and land packages are being offered through the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme.

In regard to the policy and the policy settings, it might be better to discuss with Bethel Sendaba from the EPSDD how those settings are put together. But we definitely provide some input into that review that is ongoing through EPSDD.

Ms Sendaba: Thanks, Mr Holt. Just to clarify, the review has commenced in relation to the action and the recommendation from the Auditor-General's report, which was following a change to the nature and type of housing that is available or is offered by the SLA. As described by both the minister and Mr Holt, there have been some changes to the offering through the program, specifically around house and land packages. We are speaking to the SLA and are reviewing, essentially, how well that has gone so that we can consider that in the context of the overall policy settings.

The other comment I would make is in relation to the thresholds. Mr Parton, you have asked whether there needs to be a change to those thresholds. They are set within an affordability objective. We look at the income thresholds and then look at what is affordable for people on different incomes. That has been the driver in setting the sale price of those properties, and that is a key criterion. Departing from that model would be quite a considerable change to the scheme.

MR PARTON: I agree with you that it would be. If you want to make homes affordable and genuinely in that affordable bracket, that has obviously got to be the start point. I guess the question I am asking here is: has the market left that price point behind? If the price of housing has risen by 30 per cent but in that time the increase to the threshold numbers has gone up by only 1.7 per cent, how is it that affordable housing blocks are able to be built and delivered when the market has moved so much?

Ms Sendaba: I think the answer to that is that we will find that out in the review process, relying specifically on the house and land packages that the SLA have offered and undertaking a review of their ability to deliver those.

MR PARTON: All right. Notwithstanding the fact that that review is still to come, Minister, I am asking you specifically, given the increase in costs for builders and land price, how is it that a supplier will be able to continue to deliver a product within the current Affordable Home Purchase Scheme threshold? Do you have concerns about their ability to continue to do that?

Ms Berry: I am going to ask Mr Dietz or Mr Holt to provide a little bit more detail, because you are talking about the product and form of an actual build in a house. I think some of the officials might be able to provide you with a little more specific detail in response to that question. I understand the question, though, Mr Parton.

Mr Dietz: In response to the question, Mr Parton, you are right: it is a significant challenge. When we look to design our estates, when we look to design the type of land product which will be appropriate for affordable housing, we do our best to ensure that that product matches the final end need. Therefore, an unrestricted market value of that product is as close as possible to the type of restricted value of that product. In the end, when we release the product, we value the product with the knowledge that the affordable requirement will be built by a builder. So the valuation

does reflect that a builder needs to build an affordable product.

MR PARTON: Okay.

Mr Holt: I can probably add to that, with some experience we are having with the house and land packages that are currently out to the market now. These house and land packages were released during the 2020 year, so pre-COVID and pre the price rises that have occurred with building materials and supplies of labour and those sorts of things. It is definitely a challenge to deliver some of these products but, as Mr Dietz mentioned, when these products were put to the market back in 2020 and we selected the builders to participate in the scheme, that was taken into consideration. Now that we are noticing the changes in prices, we are obviously monitoring the health of our builder partners in these programs, making sure that they still have the financial capacity to deliver the product at the stated price thresholds. To date, we have not had any builders withdraw or any issues around meeting those price thresholds with those products.

MR PARTON: All right. Thank you.

MS ORR: I just wanted to get an update on the housing strategy and the progression of that strategy over the annual reports period.

Ms Berry: We have been working away, despite some of the challenges in implementing that housing strategy. There have been report cards presented to the Assembly on how the strategy has been implemented since it was launched in 2018. The strategy really is about making sure that we improve access to safe, secure and affordable housing for everybody, across a range of different areas. As you will know, the government reports on the strategy's implementation. The first housing strategy report card was released in November 2019, and in that report card it showed that 15 of the 16 targeted actions were completed as part of that work.

The second report card was released in February 2021, and there are now 14 completed actions out of that report card. Our year 3 report card was released in November last year as well. In that report card there were 21 actions completed, one in development, 32 progressing and 13 continuing. The strategy also includes seven annual actions, all of which have been completed since the release of the second report card. The information that is in the strategy, which we aim to achieve as part of delivering on the strategy, is making sure, as I said, that we are providing that equitable and diverse supply of land, reducing homelessness, strengthening social housing assistance, improving affordable rental options and increasing affordable home ownership.

There have been a number of changes, through the ACT government's policies, in how we deliver on all of those goals across a range of different areas. That includes affordable housing, which we were just talking about; strengthening our social housing space. We have mandated our target of at least 15 per cent of residential land in an indicative land release program being provided for affordable community and public housing. Previously that was just in greenfield development. Now it includes brown as well. That means that there is the capacity to build affordable community and public housing across all of the land development in the ACT.

I might have to ask somebody from the office there to provide a little bit more detail on the report card, or I can of course refer you to my statement in the Assembly.

MS ORR: No, that is good. I was interested in some of the change that that had driven across broader government policy, and you gave a couple of examples there. The only thing I would ask as a follow-up would be what other changes are you seeing across government as a result of the implementation of the housing strategy?

Ms Berry: There have been a number of changes. I have talked to the 15 per cent that it provides, across greenfield and brownfield sites, of community, public and social housing. We have been able to meet some of the targets that we have set in those spaces as part of the indicative land release program. We had a target of 307 dwellings. Of that, there were 155 public housing dwellings, 30 community housing and 122 affordable housing dwellings. Those have been agreed for release across the territory for the 2021-22 financial year. In the affordable and community housing space you will recall that there is a land tax exemption for home owners who rent their properties out at an affordable rate. This is the rate that is defined at 75 per cent or less than market rent.

This program has a cap on it of 250 properties. Ninety properties have been registered, so there is heaps of opportunity there for people who own additional houses as investment properties to have a social conscience, sign up to those programs and deliver those properties as an affordable rental, as part of affordable community housing with that land tax exemption.

In the community housing sector we have had significant engagement across that space and we have had, through the Suburban Land Agency, land provided as opportunities for community housing. There were sites available in Scullin, Giralang and a couple of other suburbs in 2020. There are also purchases of land—across the counter purchases and also ballots—within the Suburban Land Agency. We have talked about the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme and direct housing from community housing providers. I could go on, but I am just mindful that I will take up all of the time if I keep talking through the strategy.

MS ORR: No, no; that is good. I am happy to finish my questioning there.

MR CAIN: Minister, what is the definition of land being released? For example, does it refer to the block being fully developed, with services et cetera, and thus being available for sale?

Ms Berry: I might ask Mr Dietz to answer. It is crossing over a little into the planning space, but we can provide a bit of advice there in any case.

Mr Dietz: I think the answer, Mr Cain, is the answer that I heard provided earlier in the week from Mr Ponton around when it is available for sale. To give a little more definition there, we would measure it as knowing that there is a clear intention to sell and a clear definition of what is being sold, as well as then the public release process actually starting.

MR CAIN: And what state is that in? This is the substance of my question: what state is it in when it is available for sale?

Mr Dietz: It will depend on the type of land that we are offering. For example, to take a ballot process, we may start the process before the land has actually finished to operational completion, and that process may take some time. It may get through to an exchange of contracts before the land is operationally complete and ready to title. In industry sometimes that process can be two years before the land is ready to go. The SLA would usually wait until the civil works are well contracted and underway before we would look to release land.

MR CAIN: Okay. Minister, as we have already discussed, on Tuesday the Chief Minister said that land release only impacted the housing price minimally because land release made up only two per cent of dwellings purchased in the ACT in 2021-22. Last year at budget estimates your government admitted that they had not met their land release targets. For the sake of brevity, I am just looking for a yes or no answer to the following: do you think the fact that you have not met your land release targets has impacted housing prices in the ACT?

Ms Berry: No, because it was less than one per cent of the market—

MR CAIN: Thank you, Minister.

Ms Berry: and the indicative land release program—

MR CAIN: Thank you, Minister. That is the answer; I just said that a yes or no is fine.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, it would be polite if you let somebody finish their sentence when they are speaking. I will just remind you that we are livestreaming. For Hansard, it is very difficult to hear the minister's answer if you interrupt, so please do not.

MR CAIN: I did actually ask just for a yes or no so that we could move on quickly to other things. The minister has said no, so that is sufficient for now.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. So you have finished your question?

MR CAIN: No. I have a follow-up. Minister, considering the recent ballots in Whitlam, Macnamara and Taylor, which had applicants far exceeding the blocks available, do you think the land released by the ACT government meets the demand for detached housing?

Ms Berry: Mr Cain, we have been over this and over this, both me and the Chief Minister.

MR CAIN: Please answer the question then.

Ms Berry: I do not think you need to be impolite. I am getting to the response, Mr Cain. The previous answer that I gave was no, because it was less than one per cent of the indicative land release program that could not be provided by the Suburban Land Agency for a range of reasons—of the two per cent, I should remind you, that

the Suburban Land Agency is responsible for, as far as land release in the ACT goes, including private developers as well. Second—

MR CAIN: Minister—

Ms Berry: Sorry; you were interrupting again.

MR CAIN: Chair, just to confirm, is the minister saying that the answer is no to the question “Do you think land release by the ACT government meets demand for detached housing?” Is the answer no?

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, I think we would all find it easier to understand what the minister is saying if you allowed her to finish her sentence. She has answered that question. I believe it has been answered. Unless you have a fresh piece of information that you are asking, I think this question might be finished.

MR CAIN: Chair, sorry; I do not actually understand what the answer was. If you can illuminate, that would be appreciated.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to restate your question very briefly and allow the minister to finish her sentence?

MR CAIN: Minister, yes or no? Do you think the land released by the ACT government meets the demand for detached housing? Yes or no?

Ms Berry: Mr Cain, there are no simple answers there. We have talked about this, as I said, at length. It is completely irresponsible and unrealistic to suggest that it is as simple as yes, or no, as you have asked. House prices and demand are complex, which we have gone through in great detail in this committee, and the Chief Minister has in other committees. It is not as simple as you are suggesting. That is why the Suburban Land Agency has continued to provide, with less than one per cent of indicative land release across the last five years, and will continue to aim to provide over 2,000 more than the previous land release program, which has not slowed down. We have not held out land release, but we are in an unprecedented situation, which we have described in detail as well, experienced not just here in the ACT but across the country as well.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cain, you have had many supplementaries on this point, and it is time to move on. You are welcome to ask a fresh question, if we have time, when we return.

Minister, I have a new question. We have a major planning review going on at the moment. I understand affordability will be one of the many things that that planning review will be looking at. Are you involved, and is the SLA involved, in that planning review, and what are you doing as part of that major planning review to make sure that we get some affordable housing options?

Ms Berry: This sits within the planning minister’s remit. However, of course, as a minister in the government, I will carefully, and the Suburban Land Agency will carefully, consider the impact of planning refreshes or reviews, as it goes out to the

community for consultation in the near future. Of course, we pay attention to any of that, to make sure that it does not impact on our ability to deliver affordable housing, and that we deliver on our housing strategy.

Some of the complications that we have seen in the delivery of housing in the ACT, with respect to providing more rentals, has been through the impact of some members of the community and others suggesting that housing be built in certain areas, regardless of the make of the house, and whether it should be developed. That provides some challenges not only in delivering the Indicative Land Release Program but also in the affordable community and public housing space. Mr Dietz might have some more information around some of the planning changes that might impact on the Suburban Land Agency's ability to deliver the Indicative Land Release Program and the housing strategy more generally.

Mr Dietz: I will talk a little bit, process-wise, to answer the question. The answer is yes; I work very closely. At a director-general level, I meet with Ben Ponton at least once every two weeks. There are often discussions around how either variations to the Territory Plan or the future replenishment of the Territory Plan is occurring and how we can ensure that we can inject the input that is required.

Maybe Ben can talk a little more about the process of consultation, but it has been thorough. Within my own team, we often talk significantly about how we can inject ourselves and improve some of the outcomes on both an affordability basis and in the area of working within the urban frame. I have no doubt that that will continue. Definitely, through the options of consultation within government, we will be very prominent in ensuring that those inputs are there.

MR PARTON: My question is in regard to community housing providers who, of course, play, for the most part, a significantly larger role in addressing the need for social and affordable housing in most other jurisdictions. As at 30 June 2021, there were only 776 dwellings provided by community housing providers in the ACT, which represents less than 0.5 per cent of the housing stock.

The City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency determination 2021 that was released in December 2021 sets out annual housing targets for new suburbs. Just over 2,000 new dwellings have been approved, but only 30 of these are for community housing. The SLA's 2021 report indicates that no plots were released for community housing in the year to June 2021. Minister, could you outline what the ACT government is doing to assist community housing providers to build more affordable homes?

Ms Berry: I will ask Mr Dietz or Mr Holt to provide some more detail on the land that has been provided or is available for community housing providers to purchase as part of their contribution to delivering the ACT government's housing strategy.

We have been working pretty closely with community housing providers across the ACT over the last 12 months, probably, to understand, and be a little bit more innovative about, how we can support community housing providers in the ACT to deliver more.

Obviously, we have a strategy in the ACT whereby we are committed to continuing to prioritise public housing, and to maintaining our rate of public housing—the highest number, per capita, in the country. We want to continue with that as a priority, but we know that community housing providers play a significant role in providing affordable housing in the ACT.

We have recently put out some expressions of interest for affordable housing across three areas of the ACT. Community housing providers or others can put in an expression of interest. The Suburban Land Agency and the ACT government are committed to providing affordable rentals in Gungahlin as part of that process.

I do not think that providing affordable rentals is limited to community housing providers. I think we will see more private developers or others, who are interested in providing affordable rentals in the ACT or across the country, coming up with different kinds of innovative ways to be able to deliver that product.

The federal government's NHFIC program also provides opportunities where we can partner closely with community housing organisations that can use the NHFIC loans scheme, as well as us; we then have this really strong partnership to deliver something that meets the needs of people not just for one moment in time, until it is solved, but for a period of time after that.

MR PARTON: I am well aware of that NHFIC framework and—

Ms Berry: That is great.

MR PARTON: most of the things that you have talked about. My question is why are we not utilising those frameworks more than we currently are?

Ms Berry: There have been a few adjustments made to NHFIC to make it more accessible to community housing providers. Previously, it was quite challenging for community housing providers to access the loans scheme here in the ACT for a variety of reasons that did not meet their business models. However, there have been adjustments to NHFIC over the last 12 to 18 months which mean that it does provide more opportunities for community housing providers. The ACT government has always—certainly, I have, in my conversations with community housing providers—emphasised our willingness to partner with them on different ways of delivering community housing or affordable rentals so that we can really mix up and provide more choice for affordable rentals in the ACT.

Mr Dietz: I can probably add something to that, Minister, on a few of the other initiatives that we are implementing to try and assist community housing providers to grow their stock in the ACT. As the minister mentioned, there are some opportunities in the market at the moment for community housing providers with some multi-unit dwellings.

With respect to some of the other changes that we have implemented, when there is an affordable housing requirement, say, on a multi-unit development, that needs to be offered through the database, and if those units are not taken up through the database, we do, with new processes, offer them to community housing providers, almost as a

first option after all of those opportunities have been exhausted through the affordable home purchase scheme.

The other thing that we are looking at to support community housing providers is in relation to the build to rent proposal that we are investigating. We have a site in Turner that we are exploring as a potential build to rent site. As an integral part of that, we are looking for opportunities where community housing providers could participate as part of that build to rent opportunity.

There are things that we are trying to do. The minister touched on a couple of the challenges around funding, in particular with NHFIC funding. Where we can support them to resolve some of those issues and progress things, we are helping as much as we can.

MR PARTON: Is there an intention from government, Minister, to set any new targets for new community housing dwellings? Will we go down that path or not?

Ms Berry: We have set a target in the parliamentary and governing agreement for 600 affordable rentals. To deliver on that, we will definitely need to partner with organisations like community housing providers, and that is definitely our aim. That is the target we are looking at, and part of delivering that will be with community housing providers.

MR PARTON: I hope we can both celebrate at the end of that target being achieved; thank you.

MR CAIN: Minister, I have a question about what I will call double commissions, and I will explain. Prior to this market boom, and in circumstances where land was sold by real estate agents for the SLA, did the contractual arrangements between agents and the SLA allow these real estate agents to take double commissions? I will give you a scenario that has been reported from the community. By a double commission, I mean a commission from the SLA, clearly, then a second commission for the agent who partners with a builder that they claim is unofficially attached to the block or has a hold on the block.

Ms Berry: I am not sure. If this is a particular circumstance that you are referring to, Mr Cain, it might be best to put the individual in touch with my office so that we can follow up for them. Perhaps Mr Dietz can talk through the process of how land is put to the market.

Mr Dietz: I might augment that, too, with the process of a very healthy culture within the SLA in that, if we do receive complaints from industry or from members of the public in such circumstances, we take them very seriously. We look to see if we can understand the nature of those complaints, and if there are any improvements to be made. We work very closely with the Integrity Commissioner to recognise that if any issues around integrity, corruption, fraud, or anything like that have occurred, we ensure that there is a very good, independent analysis.

Mr Cain, with the example that you provide, I am not aware specifically of a direct example. However, similar complaints have been made to the SLA in history. There

was one relatively recently that was talked about in earlier hearings, in the last two weeks. In those particular cases, it is absolutely the case that we will provide that information to the Integrity Commissioner.

The Integrity Commissioner has investigated an example which is similar to the one that you suggest. The outcome from the Integrity Commissioner's analysis was specifically that there was no reason for him to perceive that anything that was not integrous or that was corrupt had occurred with regard to that process within the SLA's processes.

MR CAIN: What about the behaviour of the real estate agent who, I note, may be acting in a rogue manner? How do you ensure that that type of arrangement that I described, which has been reported to us, does not happen and, if discovered, does not continue? What are the sanctions on such behaviour?

Mr Dietz: In a moment I can pass to Mr Bulless or Ms Gilbert with regard to our contractual requirements with major contractors to the SLA around conduct and integrity-type issues. In those particular areas, regarding the relationships that we have with our subcontractors and agents, we are very specific about our expected actions. Where it has arisen—as an example, it might come from our direct contact with an agent, to understand and get reports on any possible activity—it is then what is used as part of our investigation that would end up with the Integrity Commissioner, if required.

MR CAIN: Are you able to provide the details of that particular Integrity Commissioner inquiry and outcome?

Mr Dietz: For sensitivity reasons, it would be inappropriate for me to provide details of names of contractors, especially given that, when the Integrity Commissioner reviewed it, the actual outcome was that there was no particular issue that needed to be observed. I think it is appropriate for me to talk through that. The outcome was that the complaints did not warrant investigation and there was no basis for reasonable suspicion that the registration system was rigged to give any advantage to the successful registrant.

MR CAIN: I am assuming this is not a public release of an outcome?

Mr Dietz: No, that is correct.

MR CAIN: Are you able to release, perhaps, a redacted version, to avoid revealing personal and confidential information?

Mr Dietz: I can take that on notice. I am more than happy to release what is appropriate to be released.

THE CHAIR: I have a fresh question, Minister, about Lawson stage 2. We have been a bit concerned about Lawson stage 2 for various reasons. I understand the difficulty with the site and the electrical grid there. In a time of climate change—and we are seeing some pretty strong effects right now—and going forward with places like Lawson and other places, how often will we continue with above-ground powerlines?

When might we need to rethink our climate resilience servicing, electricity servicing, for new suburbs?

With Lawson stage 2, I understand there have been development delays due to the electrical power grid. Perhaps one of the officials could give us a quick summation of that. I am interested in what that looks like, given climate change, and whether we will continue building overhead powerlines in a world in which we are having such intense storms and where it is starting to look like it might be a bit of a problem.

Ms Berry: I will ask Mr Dietz to provide some information about where Lawson is up to and some of the issues that you have described. With some of these issues, unfortunately, there is no solution at the moment, and more work needs to happen in that space across the country, not just here in the ACT. I definitely understand where you are coming from. It is not a problem that we have been able to resolve.

Mr Dietz: Moving forward, often the decision is very site-specific. A decision will require investigation of all of the financial inputs, all of the environmental inputs and all of the social inputs. Certain developments may have very different inputs when you look at each of those evaluation criteria.

Take, for example, the joint venture who are contemplating the removing of powerlines and possibly putting them either underground or outside their development area. With respect to the impact that might have on development yield, the water-sensitive urban design of the area, the environment of the area and the social outcomes of that, they are all very different to applying those same evaluation criteria to Lawson stage 2. Moving forward, I think it will remain a site-specific investigation until the time that there is a much higher ability to continue as per a single policy.

Looking at Lawson stage 2, we did a very specific analysis of that site to understand the social, the environmental and the financial costs and benefits of undergrounding the powerlines. In that particular instance, with respect to undergrounding the powerlines just for the purpose associated with the development of Lawson 2, when we took it to the board, having evaluated social, environmental and financial, it was not our recommendation to underground.

THE CHAIR: Is it a good prompt to look at some other options, such as community grid or off-grid, if that site is turning out to be so difficult to develop with overhead powerlines, and if underground powerlines are expensive? I hear all of that. Is this a good decision point for government to look at a different way of providing power?

Ms Berry: For Lawson, there has been a lot of work on investigating that particular site. As Mr Dietz said, it is a very site-specific investigation. However, there are opportunities, and the Suburban Land Agency has been working across many developments on the possibility of community batteries and the like in the second part of Jacka. Jacka also has some challenges in place with regard to an appeal against a development in that area. However, that is a real opportunity, in looking specifically at that site, for providing community batteries, solar panels and the like. It can well operate in a very different way. Yes, the Suburban Land Agency has been considering those, and continue to do so, moving forward.

THE CHAIR: Is that something that we might see for Lawson stage 2, or are we still in the consideration phase?

Ms Berry: I do not think that is possible.

Mr Dietz: You are right, Minister. With the specific nature of Lawson stage 2, even if we were to look at having a community battery to provide the power requirements for that development, it does not change the fact that there is an electricity subzone which needs to be placed in that particular area, or the financial cost of moving that electricity subzone.

MR PARTON: I will go back to the affordable purchase program, because we have a stack of things that we want to ask in that regard. Specifically, first up, how many people are currently registered with the affordable purchase program?

Ms Berry: We might have that number somewhere.

Mr Dietz: I am sure Mr Holt would be able to provide that answer.

MR PARTON: The pressure is on you now, Mr Holt!

Mr Holt: I did mention it earlier. We have over 4,000—I have just been corrected; it is 4½ thousand registered people interested in the scheme. Obviously, registration is not necessarily eligibility; that is people who have done a self-assessment of whether they are interested in the scheme. That is stage 1. Stage 2 is going through to eligibility, and we have just over 600 eligible purchasers.

MR PARTON: Given that there are more people registered than properties, how is it that the properties are allocated? How do you ensure transparency of the allocation process?

Mr Holt: It is a ballot process, similar to the process that Mr Bulless went through before, about ensuring transparency and accountability, and probity of the process, so there is a similar type of arrangement that is undertaken.

With the way that the ballots are undertaken, people register for the database. They fill in their preferences for the type of dwellings and locations that they are interested in. We generally target those people who have expressed particular interest in a development in that certain area that meets their preferences. People who are eligible are able to enter into a ballot process, the ballot runs, and the people are drawn out of a hat, effectively.

MR PARTON: Those blocks must also have been allocated in some way, shape or form to a developer, to a builder?

Mr Holt: Yes. When they are released originally, because these are part of a scheme, we are looking for a builder partner who can develop a product that meets the price thresholds of the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. To get the economies of scale for the builders, we package them up into builder's lots, generally in the range of, say, four to six, or 10—that sort of size. Sometimes we partner them up with some sites

that do not have affordability requirements, so there is potential to cross-subsidise some of the development costs across the scheme.

Yes, we release it to builders; we identify the builders, we get them on board and they go through their design and planning phase, so that they get their developments to a point so that we can then offer them to the people on the database.

MR PARTON: Are developers able to advise that they have been unable to sell a property designated for the affordable purchase program, and then go on to sell it on the open market? How many times has this happened in recent years and how do they demonstrate that genuine efforts have been made to sell the property as an affordable property?

Mr Holt: Yes, it has happened in the past that some of the developments have not been able to be sold to people on the database. I touched earlier on how, especially with the unit developments, that is the case. They might have unit dwellings which are offered to the database; some of the database might express an interest in that product, they then enter into discussions with the developer and, for whatever reason, they do not proceed to a sale.

We continue to run the process until we have exhausted all of the interest out of the database. Once we have no more names to provide to the developer, the developer can apply to us to be released from their obligations under the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. Whilst that means they do not necessarily need to sell to someone out of the database, they do need to sell the product under the same terms as for the affordable home purchasing. Basically, they can go out and find their own purchaser, but they then need to sell the property with the same controls in place.

With the way that we follow up on that, when they register the title, because generally in the past a lot of these have been unit developments, as they complete the development and register the title, they have to nominate who the purchaser is. That is how we can follow up at the end of the scheme to make sure that they sold them under the conditions.

MR PARTON: Surely, we would have instances—and I know some of these have been raised with me—where some properties may have a price threshold of \$440,000 but they are now actually worth \$700,000 on the open market. If we get to a situation where builders are just choosing their own people to purchase, surely, that is the recipe for things that were not supposed to be a part of the affordable home program, in that people will be making money out of it, and making big money out of it.

Mr Holt: We do put a caveat on the first purchaser in the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme. There is a requirement to be owner-occupiers. Especially with the house and land packages, there is a three-year requirement that they are to be an owner and occupier of the house and land package.

With units, they have to be there for a year. With units, as I mentioned before, there is quite a lead time from buying off the plan to effectively the development being constructed and someone moving in. They then have to be in the dwelling for a year after that.

We do implement the policy as it stands. As EPSDD officials mentioned earlier, there is a review of the scheme. We are constantly monitoring the performance of the scheme and the experience of our builders and our purchasers, to understand, I suppose, the movement in the market more generally and how that impacts on the performance of the scheme overall.

MR PARTON: What about the last little bit, which I assume will be taken on notice: is it possible to get a number in terms of how many occasions this has occurred, say, in the last three years—a builder coming to you and saying, “No, I haven’t been able to provide this package, so I’m going to find my own affordable purchaser”? Is it possible for me to get a number for how many times that has occurred?

Mr Holt: I can give you a number now for the last 12 months, from January 2021, which I mentioned earlier. I identified that there were seven what we call completed sales. That means there were seven developments that had been through the process and reached a conclusion, which meant we had either sold all of the dwellings or there was no-one left out of the database interested in pursuing, and the developer has come back to us and said, “There’re no other purchasers from the scheme; we would like our requirement to deliver to the database to be removed.”

As I mentioned earlier, there were seven developments that were completed sales since January 2021 until February this year. Out of those seven developments, there were 117 dwellings; they were offered as part of those seven developments. There were 34 sales to the affordable home purchase database out of that. With the balance of those sites—my maths is not very good at this time of day—whilst they are not being offered to the database, the developer does need to settle them to a purchaser under the terms and conditions that would apply to the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS ORR: I want to get an update on the Mingle program. I note it is finishing up in Moncrieff, so I just wanted to get a bit of an update on how that one was finalised and where to next for the program, given it is still operating in a number of places.

Ms Berry: Thanks, I know that you have participated in some of the Mingle program activities. The Suburban Land Agency is really proud of that program and how it connects community before the suburb is built, and then continues on for a while to build those really strong networks within the community. It is much easier to do in a new suburb than finding ways to do that in older suburbs. I can ask Mayumi Piper to provide some detail and to talk about some of the work in Moncrieff but, of course, the program is kicking off in Whitlam as well, and it continues in Taylor.

Ms Piper: Correct; Moncrieff did finish up in June of 2021. At the same time we also wrapped up the program for Coombs and Wright, and now our focus is really on Whitlam and also in Taylor in Gungahlin. In Whitlam, it is a program that we started much earlier and this was from the feedback that we have received from the community. As soon as people are purchasing their land, we like to have that connection with them so that even though they have not moved into the suburb, they

can have a connection and start to form those relationships. We find that it is really important, even before they are officially a resident, for them to start to have that sense of place before they become a community member.

MS ORR: Okay, great. What is the program looking like for Taylor over the next 12 months?

Ms Piper: Coming out of COVID it has been a little bit interesting. We are slowly hosting some more activities, given that restrictions have eased a little bit. We find that the modest activities are working a lot better, where we can hold a smaller event and people can come together and have more of those quality connections that really have the longevity for the program.

MS ORR: Can you give me an example of what one of those projects would be, just so I can understand what you mean by the smaller ones?

Ms Piper: Yes. For example, I was in Throsby this morning with a play group. We met at Joey Park. There were six mothers out there with their children. We are encouraging them to connect with each other and we bring things such as nature play out there for them to connect with the environment and mix with each other.

MS ORR: Okay, thank you.

MR CAIN: Minister, regarding the purchase of SLA properties, are SLA staff able to purchase such properties or land?

Ms Berry: Mr Dietz.

Mr Dietz: Mr Cain, we do not unilaterally disallow SLA staff from purchasing SLA properties, and in some areas it is considered a very good KPI that staff are interested in the quality product that we provide. However, we take conflict of interest incredibly seriously within the agency. Our process ensures that if anyone is thinking about purchasing SLA land or the land that is coming through our joint venture, that they are very open with their manager. They need to fill out an appropriate conflict of interest form, which identifies the specific nature of their interest.

They need to have a discussion with their manager to understand the risks that might be related based on their particular role. With the agreement of their manager, they define a management strategy to mitigate any of the perceived risks that might be there. If that is not possible, if they are not able to mitigate the risks appropriately, then the particular conflict of interest form would reflect that.

I can give an example. In my role, I am not going to purchase SLA or government land. Theoretically, there may be ways I could mitigate the risks. I could put up Chinese walls so that information that might give me a competitive advantage would not be made known to me. But the perceived risk is too high; I am not able to purchase SLA land. That is an agreement that I have with my manager, the chair of the SLA board. For someone else in the agency, though, whose role may not have anything to do with the pricing of land, the production of land and the registration process, it may be relatively easy for us to ensure that there are mitigation actions in

place which appropriately mitigate the risks of that person being seen as a perceived conflict.

So we allow each to be managed on an individual basis. At an executive level, we do not take away the responsibility from an individual to identify their own conflicts. However, we put as many safety nets as we can in place to ensure that the culture remains one of being very open and transparent. We have a significant amount of education with regard to conflicts of interest. I actually write individually to new employees of the SLA, informing them of their requirements under conflicts of interests. We also then ensure that at an executive level we are aware, across the agency, of anyone who may have an interest in buying SLA land and has declared the conflict of interest so that we can also ensure that, through any other unexpected process, their names do not appear on a list.

MR CAIN: Thank you. What about relatives?

Mr Dietz: That is a very good question, Mr Cain, because it is often something where the line can be a little bit grey. Understanding what might be known as a family unit, might be quite different for an Indigenous type of family than it might be for a non-Indigenous family. And if someone has an estranged aunty who they have not communicated with for 10 years, is she deemed a relative, or not? In each of those situations, our culture is to ensure that we are very open and transparent. We raise the issue with our manager and can therefore mitigate it appropriately if needed.

MR CAIN: Obviously the checks that you have in place are sensible ones. Have you had instances where staff—or a close relative—have not made the appropriate declarations and been able to purchase land?

Mr Dietz: To my awareness, we have not had any staff who have not declared an interest and that has resulted in the purchase of land. We have had staff who, through the process, have been identified. We have worked with them. When we realise that a registration process may have begun, we have needed to work with them to ensure that they were not part of the proceeding of that registration process.

MR CAIN: Thank you. Given that there is a declaration required, over the last three years, approximately how many staff or close relatives of staff have purchased property from the SLA?

Mr Dietz: I can take that on notice, Mr Cain. It is a small number, but I am happy to take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, do you have a question?

MR PARTON: Yes. I am happy to go with one of these; I have thousands of them.

Ms Berry: It is Friday afternoon, come on!

MR PARTON: We have a bit of that action going so we are all sweet here! I will go

back to the affordable purchase program. I am talking specifically about the tender on Taylor 1B affordable lots, which were first tendered in 2019 and not awarded until late last year. Have you received any correspondence or complaints from builders who were successful in the tender, who will be unable to complete the transaction because they can no longer cover their costs due to the increase in construction costs and the delay in the tender?

Ms Berry: I might have to ask Mr Dietz to respond to that one. I do not believe that I have, but I will ask Mr Dietz.

Mr Dietz: I am happy to ask Mr Holt, if he is aware; otherwise I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr Holt: I am not aware of any complaints being raised directly with us. I am aware that we have three builders appointed to deliver those affordable packages and those packages are currently in the process of being offered to our database. But, no, I have not had any particular issues raised. We are conscious of the fact that there potentially could be an issue, given that the prices of construction have gone up significantly over the last 12 months, and we are monitoring that. But I am not aware of any approaches directly to the SLA.

MR PARTON: What were the specific reasons for the delay? I am looking for anything other than COVID, if there is anything, and whether the government intends to take two years to complete future tenders for affordable homes.

Mr Dietz: I can start with the answer there and then move to Nick. I think the answer to the second part of the question—do we intend to take a significant amount of time for future ones?—is in the examples of Whitlam and later releases in Taylor, which have been really quite successful. The answer to the initial part of the question—why Taylor took a significant amount of time—was innovation. We were really wanting to work with industry to innovate and to come up with innovative ideas to provide both the affordable and the community housing. That particular process was targeted at innovation and went through a more detailed two-stage process. Nick, I am happy for you to provide a bit more example there.

Mr Holt: Yes, spot on, John. That is exactly what it was. The ones there were the first ones that we had offered to the market, and we wanted to understand what the opportunities and challenges were to delivering an affordable house and land package. So we did tailor it as a two-stage process with an expression of interest first, where we heard back from the builders about what is the best way to deliver these. Then we had to craft a tender stage to take on board the feedback that we got out of that process.

COVID was part of the issue through that, and there were some delays due to that. It probably did go on a little bit longer than when we had originally anticipated, but I think the key point was that it was a new process, and we did it as two stages to try and ensure that what we offered through a tender package was most likely to lead to success.

MS ORR: Can I please get a bit of an update on the build-to-rent scheme and just where that is up to. How is it progressing?

Ms Berry: I will ask Mr Dietz to talk through some of that.

Mr Dietz: Again, in the interest of time, I am going to hand to Nick Holt. Nick has had a good workout today.

Mr Holt: Build-to-rent is progressing quite well. We did get some funding through last year's budget process to investigate the feasibility of developing the build-to-rent industry in the ACT. It is a relatively new asset class in Australia. It is very popular overseas, but it has not landed probably in a way that we might have expected in Australia and, for that matter, in the ACT.

Over the last six to 12 months, we have been doing some work looking at the feasibility of progressing a build-to-rent project on a site in Turner. Through EPSDD there was a consultancy that looked at some of the opportunities and constraints of progressing build-to-rent. We also undertook a market-sounding process back in the second half of last year to reach out to community housing providers, developers, operators of build-to-rent and superannuation funds to understand the opportunities and the issues that are limiting the take-up of build-to-rent in the ACT.

The information that we gathered from that market sounding process, plus the work that EPSDD had undertaken earlier last year, is being progressed for a submission that would go to government for some consideration. Obviously, the primary focus of looking at build-to-rent is to broaden the opportunities to look at affordable rental in the ACT and whether build-to-rent can achieve some of that. One of the findings that came out of that work is that to deliver something that is below market rent probably needs some level of support. There are a range of things that could be considered to assist in that respect. They could include planning changes around the types of development controls that are in place, things around land tax reductions or exemptions, and rates and tax types of things. There is also the opportunity of considering a direct subsidy to get affordable rentals. Obviously, there are lots of things there to be considered by government, and EPSDD is actually leading that work. There will be a proposition or proposal put to government for its consideration as part of this year's budget.

MS ORR: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. That brings us to the end of this section of the hearing. Thank you, minister, and officials. We will break the feed now—

MR CAIN: Can I have a really quick substantive question?

THE CHAIR: No, sorry, Mr Cain, we are finished. It is 3.55 pm, and that is our time for finishing. We will end the feed now.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Transport Canberra and City Services

Alegria, Mr Stephen, Executive Branch Manager, City Presentation

THE CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister and officials. Thanks for returning. We are up to our final session for the Planning, Transport and City Services Committee and we will be talking about sports ground management. We only have a short period of time—half an hour—so I will ask officials and the minister to keep responses brief. That would be great. I also remind members to please limit their questions. I will try not to step in and cut you off on supplementary questions, but I will do that if we are taking a bit too long.

Minister, I might commence with the first question. There is quite a lot of commentary at the moment about the impact on women's sport of the closure of the AIS arena. There are quite a number of proposals floating around about what might be a good way forward on that. Do you have any views on how that might move ahead?

Ms Berry: Thanks, Ms Clay. I am very pleased to talk about this question although, I would have to say, it has been incredibly frustrating for the ACT sports community, particularly our Canberra Capitals, to have been left homeless through a decision by the federal government which happened pretty much overnight. Nobody was involved or engaged in that at all, and since then we have been attempting to negotiate with the federal government to have the Australian Institute of Sport arena turned back on, at least for short-to-medium term for the Canberra Capitals and other sports groups like netball, but also for other entertainment opportunities that have happened at the AIS over a number of years.

It has been, as I said, incredibly frustrating not to have that facility, which is not owned by the ACT government but is rented by various user groups, including the ACT government. The federal government knows that that is the only option that we have, yet they have continued to refuse to provide us with a facility that we need that they own. At the moment, we are continuing to ask the federal government to look after their facility, not mothball it, and actually open it up for at least the short to medium term. We understand that it is old and that it is not going to be around, being used, for a number of years, but we did not have a chance to put in a plan because we had no idea that the federal government Sports Commission was going to take the action that it did.

It is really disappointing. We have looked at the option of a tent. I think that has been considered throughout the media, but that is not an option that we will consider in a short to medium response. It is quite an expensive response to something that will not provide more permanency, which is what we really want to see for the Canberra Capitals—not only the most successful women's team but the most successful team ever in the country as far as premierships go. As I said, we are continuing to

agitate. We will talk to both sides of the federal parliament—the coalition and our Labor colleagues—about getting some sort of a commitment around the AIS.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR PARTON: Minister, the provision of adequate sporting resources and facilities is, I think we would all agree, integral to the development of community sport and recreation in the ACT. Why does it take so long to scope new facilities, often via repeated case studies, to meet the ongoing need to provide both indoor and outdoor facilities to meet population growth and the expanding participation in organised sports? Sometimes even you must find that process most frustrating.

Ms Berry: Thanks, Mr Parton. I think sometimes it is because it is a very specific and specialised area of development not just for the ACT but for the country. If I can refer to the ice sports facility in particular, that has taken some time, but it is not like ice sports are built every day across the place; they are a very specialised, very niche facilities for particular sports. It is taking some time. We are also looking at innovation to understand if there are ways that that can be done differently or operate in a way that ensures that it is viable and sustainable and meets the needs of our community going forward. So in examples like that one, it is going to take a bit of time because it is quite a niche sport and quite specialised.

MR PARTON: Broadly speaking, though, when it comes to these processes, the Suburban Land Agency certainly appears to have been brought into the process of considering new sporting facilities. Why is their engagement not part of the earlier master planning or precinct planning process rather than at the stage of interim facility planning or even design?

Ms Berry: They actually are in the development of new suburbs, where land is released and there is provision for sports facilities, moving forward—or example, probably down at Molonglo and Coombs. Although it was well before the Suburban Land Agency was in place, there was land identified for sports fields below Stromlo, as you might recall. But for existing suburbs, or parts of the city that are seeing increased density, it does become challenging to build on brownfield sites, for a range of reasons.

That is a little bit different from the example that I provided around the ice sports facility, but the Suburban Land Agency definitely are, as well as Education. Education plays an important role in making sure that there are sports facilities not just for when school is on, but also for the broader community to utilise outside of the school hours—so, sports fields, indoor sports, and other community facilities. There are a range of opportunities there to deliver in new areas. It becomes more challenging in older brownfield sites, that is for sure, for a range of different reasons which I have talked about.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Minister.

MR MILLIGAN: I understand that the SLA and whatnot are involved during the master plan or precinct planning, particularly for new suburbs, but when we are talking about existing suburbs and retrofitting sporting infrastructure into those how

much extra time does including the SLA during that process add to any planning or design phase of implementing new sporting fields?

Ms Berry: Perhaps if you can give me a specific area that you are interested in, Mr Milligan, it might help me to be able to respond to that question.

MR MILLIGAN: There are a number of different areas—for instance, over here at Casey, and Amaroo, particularly with the new tennis facility—where the land was not necessarily allocated for sport and rec, but that land has now been allocated for that. Tennis ACT is proposing to build that facility there. How much additional time does this add to the design and implementation of any new facility?

Ms Berry: Since Gungahlin started and evolved as an area of Canberra, there has been a significant change in the sports landscape, with the highest participation in the country and our sports continuing to grow. So, then you need to consider if there is land available in existing suburbs that could be utilised for purposes outside of a new build. That is the work that Sport and Recreation and the ACT government consider moving forward. That will be a really great internationally high-standard facility that the ACT government will build, not Tennis ACT. We are hoping to partner with Tennis ACT and Tennis Australia across the development of that to provide other opportunities to bring different kinds of content to the ACT, similar to the project in Throsby with the Home of Football.

MS ORR: I want to get an update on this La Nina weather event and how we are going with managing the sports grounds, given that it has been quite a challenging weather year.

Ms Berry: Yes, it has been a couple of years, actually, that the wet weather has impacted our sports fields in the ACT for a variety of reasons. Last year was probably a little bit worse, although we have more to come this year. I might ask Mr Alegria to provide a little detail about how Sport and Rec are managing that across our sports and our sports fields.

Mr Alegria: I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privileges statement. It has been a wet summer season this year as it was last year. That clearly has been mostly very good for the sports grounds. While we have irrigation in place, there is nothing that beats good, solid rainfall, so overall it has been a benefit, but of course, it has come with some issues and challenges.

Early in the spring mowing season this year we had COVID related delays to our service delivery and as a result we had a bit of a backlog of mowing even on sports grounds, which are normally subject to a higher frequency of mowing than other areas. So we had to catch up on that; we had to do a little bit of extra work with removing clippings from some areas—for example, down in Calwell. So, yes, there was a little bit of disruption to the normal smooth running of our maintenance operation.

But we are really looking forward now to the coming period between seasons, where we are going to take advantage of the seasonal conditions for our usual renovation period. We are confident that we are going to have a really good condition for the sports grounds for the coming season.

MS ORR: Okay, great. Thank you. I think that actually answers all my questions.

MR MILLIGAN: Obviously, we have had a lot more rain this season and it has had a bit of an impact on our sporting fields. Just out of interest, has the government been contacted by any sporting clubs, associations or organisations in relation to sporting fields and their drainage? If you have, will you be looking at resurfacing, fixing or remedying the issue of poor ground make-up when it comes to overwatering?

Mr Alegria: Yes. We do receive feedback through our peak body stakeholders and others around oval conditions, and we take that on board and take it very seriously. For example, you mentioned drainage this year; we have works in the pipeline for this financial year down at Wanniassa and Kambah. In fact, I think we have completed one of the Kambah jobs, which involved sand slitting of the oval, where we cut a furrow into the surface and insert sand to improve drainage. We also have some oval renovations that are being undertaken outside the normal twice-a-year shutdown down in Calwell and Wanniassa to try and boost the condition of those ovals in a way that does not impact the users of those ovals. They are additional things to what we would normally do in our twice-a-year renovation. Through the course of the year, as well, we obviously undertake a whole range of maintenance activities as the season and the time of the year dictates.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay. Thank you very much.

We all know that there were many sporting fields that were decommissioned right across the ACT. I think it was a little over 30 or so. A lot of clubs are now expecting a bit of growth in participation and whatnot. As well, a lot of sporting codes have said that there is a lack of facilities and ovals around and that they would like more ovals to be brought online. Is the government considering bringing any of the decommissioned ovals back online to help service the need of the sporting community?

Mr Alegria: Thanks Mr Milligan. The dryland ovals are considered among the many other categories of urban open space that the ACT government manages. The dryland ovals sit alongside regular irrigated ovals or urban open space or a range of different types of neighbourhood district parks and so forth. They are all in the mix for our management regime. The way forward with dryland ovals is to consider them in the context of that bigger picture, I suppose, of urban open space. We are going to be doing that through a review of the land management plan for urban open space, which is currently being reviewed. That will be progressed with consideration of dryland ovals.

We have heard from the community around how much interest there is in dryland ovals. People understand that it is not a case of simply turning irrigation back on, but people and communities have suggested other uses for dryland ovals that might add a little bit of value or provide more amenity. So we will be considering that in the context of the land management plan review, which will produce a draft document, which will be available for public consultation in due course.

MR MILLIGAN: When are we expecting that draft documentation or consultation?

Are we talking in the next six months or 12 months?

Mr Alegria: Yes, the current schedule is that we would have something available for the community or a draft plan available around the middle of this year. It has been a work in progress for a few months now, and we are starting to get to the point where we have a plan that we should be able to release, as I said, in the middle of the year.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay, I look forward to seeing that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Milligan. That brings me to my next question, which is on the same topic. I was really happy when we passed my motion last year about including the dryland ovals in that land management report and I had an update recently about that; it sounds like it is progressing well. One of those projects was a bit further advanced than the other ones. The minister will know—it is very close to both our hearts—if any of the consultations have managed to progress in Florey or if COVID had put a delay to that?

Ms Berry: COVID has definitely put a pause on some of that work. However, I understand the Education Directorate has still been working very closely with the school community in the first instance. As I have said all the way through this, the priority was providing green space for the school community in the first instance and then we would continue to talk with the broader community about other potential uses for other parts of that dryland oval that were not being utilised by the school.

Through the process that has just been outlined by Mr Alegria there might be other options that have not been considered by the Florey community for other parts of that dryland oval to be utilised. So, yes, COVID has impacted pretty much everything.

THE CHAIR: Do you think that pretty soon during this year we might be able to connect the school community and the Florey community and get a good discussion going?

Ms Berry: That is the intention. Obviously, we do not want a separation between the community and the school to exist; we want them to be spaces that are utilised by everybody in different kinds of ways that suit their needs. I have to say, we have just been a little bit preoccupied with responding to COVID, but it is definitely on our radar, and we know that the community and the school are both keen to see things progress there.

I guess I just have to ask for a little bit more patience. I know I have been saying that for a while now, but, yes, we have just been focusing on responding to COVID and so a few other areas that were a priority have not been activated in a time frame that, I guess, the community would have liked to see. We are definitely aware that there is significant interest down there, and we will continue that work when we can.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Mr Alegria, a few of us are very interested in hearing you but we are finding you a little bit difficult to hear. If you could speak up the next time, that would be great. Mr Parton, do you have a question?

MR PARTON: Yes, I do. Minister, in an earlier answer in this session you made

mention of the importance of public school sporting infrastructure and its use by the wider community, so I just wanted to follow up and ask: what provisions can be made to provide more efficient access and usage to those public school amenities that you spoke of for use by the wider community and by sporting groups?

Ms Berry: That is a really good question. Prior to COVID there was work occurring with Sport and Rec and Education to provide more opportunities to open up sports facilities more conveniently rather than the old way of having to go to whoever's house and collect the key and turn off the alarm and open up the stadium. You will see that our tennis clubs have moved to an online booking process as well, so we do not have those circumstances where the key is in the letterbox of the president or whoever in the tennis club.

We have been able to do that work where there is a keypad or security entrance at Alfred Deakin, for example. Whereas previously it was not easy for the sports club to access that, now they can access that through, I think, a keypad security system outside of school hours. We have not done a lot of those projects in the last couple of years, but those are definitely the way forward in terms of opening up opportunities for clubs to access those spaces.

MR PARTON: Minister, what is the feedback? Has that centralised application and booking process provided efficiencies and has it provided satisfaction to clubs and organisations that are seeking to access school facilities for sport and rec activities? Is it working?

Ms Berry: I understand that for Alfred Deakin it is working. However, it is not centralised, but that is something that Sport and Rec and Education are considering.

MR PARTON: Considering how seriously? Is it something that you are envisaging will become a part of this landscape?

Ms Berry: It would be quite a significant piece of work, because each school is responsible for the hiring out of their facilities; but, as I said, that is one part of making schools facilities more accessible outside of school hours—through that sort of keypad entry. However, a centralised booking system is a whole other piece of work, but it is definitely something we will be considering into the future in terms of how we would be able to manage that better. In response to the last question, we have just a few things going on at the moment. We will just continue to work through the pandemic, but those considerations are definitely there.

MR PARTON: All right. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

MR MILLIGAN: A lot of the feedback that we receive from sporting groups and clubs is the fact that the pricing associated with using facilities at schools is somewhat uncompetitive, so I am wondering if the government has done any review or is going to do any review into its pricing structure to ensure that it is a bit more competitive and a bit more attractive to sporting groups?

Ms Berry: I can talk with you about our sports ground hires within the Sport and Rec space. Within the Education space, you are not in the right committee for that one; but

we can talk about pricing in the Sport and Rec space specifically.

MR MILLIGAN: That is not such a concern at this stage. I might put something through as a question on notice in terms of finding out if anything has been done in respect of the prices to use school facilities.

MS ORR: Minister, can I get an update on how the work around female-friendly pavilions is tracking and what considerations are being given to the areas around the pavilions and lighting those up?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Ms Orr. This is a piece of work that will continue for a number of years. As I keep saying to remind everybody, some of these facilities were built at a time when it was never a consideration that women might play sport and need a pavilion to get changed in or to use a bathroom. The female-friendly upgrades to those facilities are making it much more inclusive and are meeting the needs of more sports athletes to be able to access those facilities.

It was actually in your electorate, Ms Orr, that I first had the conversation with students about what were some of the barriers for young women to be able to participate in sport. The answer was that the facilities just were not inclusive and were not female friendly and that they did not feel safe because of lighting. So some of the upgrades, just to go through them again, are based on the female-friendly upgrade guidelines that are posted on the Sport and Rec website. I think that provides the guides that we use to do the female-friendly upgrades, and that includes lighting and putting doors on toilets. Hot water and heating in some of those places as well makes them much more inviting places for everybody. So some of the pavilion upgrades that we are committed to are the Greenway enclosed oval and Curtin District Playing Fields. They will have pavilion upgrades to ensure that they are female friendly. Sorry, what was the question again?

MS ORR: It was about how the program is progressing—looking at it and tracking—

Ms Berry: I might ask Mr Alegria to give some more detail there.

Mr Alegria: Hopefully you can hear me now; I am speaking more clearly. As the minister said, the annual report does report that we have completed some 16 female-friendly pavilion upgrades in that reporting period. Some of those are significant, large projects; others are quite small, where we have just gone in and made a few minor changes to the pavilions in order to make them more female friendly. It is a rolling program. We have plans to continue to upgrade those pavilions, as the minister mentioned, particularly down at Greenway. It is one of those things where we know that there is a large demand from the sporting community for women and girls to participate and we do not want to see the pavilions as being a barrier to that kind of participation.

As for lighting, Ms Orr, I guess the pavilion upgrades will include lighting inside, but of course, we also have many sports ground lighting projects that light up the actual playing surface. Obviously, those lights are not available for the broader community, but anyone who books the facility for training or match play can use those lights to provide a perfectly safe and appropriate environment for sporting activity.

MS ORR: Great. I think you have mentioned Curtin and Greenway as the next ones; can you give an indication about where we might see some of the next round of works coming in?

Ms Berry: It is a bit of a rolling program, and it does depend on budget commitments.

MS ORR: Okay.

Ms Berry: Ms Orr, I do not know the number of pavilions we have. I am guessing that it is hundreds, so it is quite a piece of work, and we will just continue to go through them and prioritise them.

MS ORR: All right, thank you. Thanks, Chair.

MR MILLIGAN: Is the government still running the topsoil program for clubs to participate in, where they can request topsoil to be brought to the ovals and then undertake improving the surfaces? Is any government expert advice given to those clubs to help them with the process?

Mr Alegria: Yes, Mr Milligan, we do provide the topsoil to clubs for the purpose of either filling in divots or doing some minor top-dressing works. And, yes, we are always available to reach out to give advice to any sporting groups around the maintenance of the ovals. We provide quite a lot of advice in relation to the cricket pitches, to the turf cricket wickets, which is a bit more specialised, but, yes, we are certainly happy to provide advice and meet that need for the topsoil if we are asked.

MR MILLIGAN: Just quickly, then, how do clubs find out about this? Is the government promoting this particular program to the clubs and associations?

Mr Alegria: Look, it is really a case of just building on the relationships we have established through the directorate. All of the peak bodies are well aware of the key contacts in Sport and Rec facilities. They are interacting with them on a daily basis for bookings and so forth. So, yes, there are ample means for the peak bodies in particular to reach out to Sport and Rec and ask for assistance.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Ms Clay.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, all. Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr Alegria and other officials for coming today. That brings us to a close of our final hearing, which is excellent news for everyone, I think. I think there might have been a question taken on notice, and we will need that back within five minutes. You are all free to enjoy your Friday afternoon in whatever way you would like to.

MR PARTON: You mean five working days, not five minutes?

THE CHAIR: Five working days. Good grief; it has been a really long day!

The committee adjourned at 4.30 pm.